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Moore, George, 1852-1933.
Esther Waters.

Helen Macdonald -

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ESTHER WATERS
BY GEORGE MOORE

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ESTHER WATERS
BY GEORGE MOORE
A PLAY IN FIVE ACTS

BOSTON: JOHN W. LUCE AND COMPANY
1913

Printed in England

ACT I
THE SERVANTS' HALL AT WOODVIEW

ACT II
KITCHEN IN A COTTAGE

ACT III
LIVING-ROOM IN MRS. LEWIS'S COTTAGE

ACT IV
A ROOM ABOVE THE BAR IN THE KING'S HEAD

ACT V
A ROOM AT WOODVIEW

Five years elapse between Acts IV and V

This play was produced for the first time at the Apollo Theatre, on December 10, 1911, at eight o'clock. The programme was as follows:

ESTHER WATERS

A Play in Five Acts

By GEORGE MOORE

The Play produced by J. Clifford Brooke

THE PEOPLE OF THE PLAY IN THE ORDER OF THEIR APPEARANCE

Randal	F. Cremlin
William	Harvey Braban
Sarah	Miss Evelyn Martheze
Esther Waters	Miss Lucy Wilson
Mrs. Latch	Mrs. A. B. Tapping
Mrs. Barfield	Miss Cicely Hamilton
Ginger	Nelson Keys
Carrie Roe	Miss Mabel Knowles
Mrs. Spires	Miss Clare Greet
Rachel Boyd	Miss Esme Hubbard
Mrs. Rivers	Miss Frances Wetherell
Fred Parsons	Arnold Lucy
Mrs. Lewis	Miss Mary Brough
Jackie (In Act 3)	Frank Brown
Jackie (In Act 5)	Len. Bethell
Barman	P. L. Julian
Journeyman	C. Herbert Hewetson
Ketley	Herbert Bunston
Bill Evans	Edmund Gurney
1st Policeman	Charles Lascelles
2nd Policeman	E. Stuart Vinden

Some of the Artists appeared by permission of Arthur Chudleigh, Robert Courtneidge, Miss Lillah McCarthy, Sir Herbert Tree, and Mme. Lydia Yavorska

Stage Manager Val Cuthbert

The Stage Society wished to "produce" *Esther Waters*, but alas! the vanity of man prompted the thought that it was beneath my dignity to submit the play to the judgment of the Committee, and so we found ourselves in an alley to which there seemed to be no outlet, until it occurred to me that I could not do better than to write to Bernard Shaw, and he sent me the following postcard in reply:

> "I have tried every possible way of bringing about the correct position, but it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than to get any sort of delicate *nuance* of manners into the head of a well-intentioned British committee. Whelen's difficulty is that if he pledges himself to anything, his committee may throw him over. He knows by experience that a play has to be quite extraordinarily bad to obtain unanimous support. All our great achievements with Ibsen, Tolstoy, Tchekoff, &c., have been scraped through by snatched divisions, and majorities of one at that. An exquisite play by Tchekoff was actually hissed. You cannot conceive how inferior we are (a small circle excepted) to the common playgoer. However, I will go at Whelen again and make him understand that you do not propose to reopen the question of your choice of a profession with him. G. B. S."

The fragrant blending of kindliness and humour in this postcard seemed to leave me no choice but to send *Esther Waters* to my old friend with a note saying that if he could recommend the play to the Stage Society for performance I should be grateful, and that

if he could not, his opinion would be equally valuable, for it would save me from further trouble. I should just put the play aside and never give it another thought. He did not, however, think the play altogether unworthy, and it is a pleasure to me to know that I owe its performance to my oldest friend, for gratitude is a luxury in which I like to indulge, and this play affords me many opportunities " of indulging " in my virtue. And having thanked Shaw, I have to thank the Stage Society for the appearance in flesh and blood of all my characters. Mr. Whelen and the Committee discovered them all with few exceptions, I could hardly believe my eyes ; but there they were, all looking exactly like themselves, assembled for rehearsals, and not one day older than when I saw them for the first time. It was a pleasure to shake hands with them all. The first to speak is Sarah Tucker ; and Miss Evelyn Martheze's intonations and gestures were the same as those I had heard and seen years ago. She rose, however, above my dream of her in her fear and her animal submission to the horrible ponce, Bill Evans, who discovers her hiding from him in the " King's Head." The old butler, Randal, was written out of one of my very earliest remembrances, and Mr. F. Cremlin made us feel that Randal's life had been linked with the Gaffer's from the very beginning, their lives had flown on together, and by one or two skilful touches he suggested this long intimacy and how familiar he was with the house. Mr. Harvey Braban as William Latch reproduced not only all that I thought and felt while writing, but the very appearance of the original who worked round the table with the original of Randal some forty-five years ago. The part of Mrs. Latch is a very small one, only a few lines, but these were admirably delivered by Mrs. Tapping. Esther Waters

seemed to have grown a little taller, but Miss Lucy Wilson was extraordinarily like—like whom? Will the reader believe me?—very like the original from whom the picture was painted, a pretty kitchen-maid and fellow-servant of Latch and Randal.

Miss Wilson is a very accomplished artist and takes her art seriously, and she carried through a very long and arduous part "without ever letting it drop." If her Esther Waters did not flash into the fire of life, the fault was as much mine as the actress's; for there is a little too much Esther in the play, and if it had been possible to cut her out of the second act her reappearance in the third act would have been waited for eagerly.

For a long time past my memories of the stage were two: Jean de Reszky in *Tristan* and Forbes Robertson in *Hamlet*; Miss Cicely Hamilton has given me a third, and I shall never forget the strain of inaudible music that began as soon as she opened the door; her voice took it up and it grew more and more intense, spending itself at last in the beautiful crescendo when she asks Esther to say a prayer with her. The two women have only just risen from their knees when Ginger comes in with Randal to tell him how the horse won at Goodwood. I had always seen Arthur Barfield a tall, thin young man about five feet eight and riding about ten seven, but Mr. Whelen and the Stage Society had not distinguished between the weights at Aintree and at Epsom. They had sought among the light-weights, finding at last Mr. Nelson Keys, who does not weigh more than eight stone. If ever an eight-stone man were lifted into the pigskin for the Liverpool Steeplechase, he would have to get two stone of lead into his saddle-cloth, and this two stone would begin to weigh very heavy when the

horse jumped into the racecourse. An admirable actor is Mr. Nelson Keys in his own parts, but his size and his methods were unsuited to the part of Ginger; circumstances, too, were against him. He had been playing in *The Arcadians* for nearly two years, and thought he would like to escape from patter into dialogue; but however weary we may be of our habits we cannot shake them off at once, and to my surprise, and no doubt to his own, he found it difficult to drop from three hundred and fifty words a minute to about one hundred and twenty. A description of a race cannot be spoken very fast. The audience must have time to realise each event as it happens. Mr. Keys understood this very well, but he found much difficulty in ridding himself of the habit of speaking too fast, and we had many little interviews on the subject; I read the account of the race to him and the producer read it, and eventually Mr. Keys reduced his speed to about two hundred words a minute and played the part to the entire satisfaction of the audience.

If this play is ever acted again, I think it would be well to leave out the second act; certainly it would be well to do so if Miss Clare Greet is not in the cast. The only excuse for playing it in the first instance was her genius, which flared up in the part of Mrs. Spires as brightly as Miss Cicely Hamilton's did in the part of Mrs. Barfield. After listening for two or three minutes I could not do else than interrupt the rehearsal. "Miss Greet," I said, "are you speaking the text or are you making it up?" And when she told me she was speaking the text, I answered, "I only asked because I had no idea I had written anything so good." Nor had I; my words were but a pretext for Miss Greet's genius, and it was only necessary to

glance at the text to feel that the instrument counted for more than the composer.

Miss Mabel Knowles realised my conception of Carrie Roe, and she added something to it; and I liked the reality better than the imagination. I did not suspect, however, that any actress could make the part of Rachel Boyd so winning as Miss Esme Hubbard made it. It had seemed to me very true while I wrote; it is not in the novel; but Miss Hubbard brought a lyrical note into it that I had not thought of, and while listening to her I said, "There is no doubt that acting tells something that no other art can tell." Miss Frances Wetherall did not think that Mrs. Rivers would speak of "suckling" her baby, and she is possibly right, but I explained to her in the wings that I did not propose "to reopen the question of my choice of a profession with her," and the part was played by her, notwithstanding the faulty dialogue, quite as well as it deserved to be played.

Fred Parsons was a stationer near the Temple; every time I went into the shop to buy notepaper it seemed to me that he was just the kind of man who would marry Esther; and when Mr. Arnold Lucy came on the stage at rehearsal my impulse was to go up to him and congratulate him on having conquered his aversion from the stage, for his fetch had told me that he had never been inside a theatre in his life. I stood looking at him, muttering, "But he isn't a day older"; and now I have much pleasure in thanking Mr. Lucy for his admirable acting in the third act. He not only looked the part but he played it.

This preface will, I fear, read somewhat monotonously; I have got nothing but good to say of everybody. Well, the fault is with the Stage Society for having given an almost ideal cast. I seemed to

meet my imaginations in the flesh everywhere and nowhere more vividly than in the person of Miss Mary Brough. She acted the dear homely soul that I had dreamed of. But I must do a little fault-finding, just for the sake of the reader, and if Mr. Edmund Gurney will forgive me I will tell him that I did not see Bill Evans as a gipsy until he came on the stage. But there is no reason why Bill Evans should not have been a long-haired gipsy. His interpretation brought a picturesque touch into the play, and if Mr. Gurney plays the part again I would not have him alter his make-up nor any intonation or gesture. He did not shrink from any of the crude expressions used ; he brought the part out in all its ferocious reality, and I hope that my appreciation of his acting will please him.

The scene between the two backers of horses struck me as being one of the good scenes in the play, reminding me, if small things may be compared to great, of the scene when Mimi and Alberich yell at each other before the cave in which the dragon lives. Mr. Herbert Bunston related his belief in omens with so much conviction that one felt very much inclined to bet according to his system. Mr. Herbert Hewetson's jeers at his reading of the omens did not shake his belief for a moment, and Mr. Herbert Hewetson was as convinced that the winner could only be picked by a long study of the weights. I have put off speaking of Jackie, Esther's child. He is eight years in the third act, and at that age children, especially boys, are ungainly on the stage. A mother loves her child because he is her child, but in my play it was necessary to have a boy that would make the audience feel that Esther could not do else than sacrifice her whole life for him. The Stage Society had not time

to look round to find the ideal Jackie, and I made their task very difficult by stipulating that a boy must play the part. For nothing is more disagreeable than to see a girl in a boy's part, or a woman playing a man's part, especially in a love scene. Were both in petticoats it might be endurable, but when one is in hose it is unendurable. There is no zest in it, no smack upon it, and I do not regret that Master Frank Brown played the part, though he must have put the thought into many a head that it was stupid for a mother to love so wooden a child. But is not every one wooden when he goes on the stage for the first time? An older boy played in the fifth act, but I am not sure that we gained by the change.

Esther Waters was produced by Mr. Clifford Brooke, and from the first rehearsal he seemed to have the entire play in his head, and to see it on the stage in its every detail. So I never interfered; there was no necessity. Once I did interfere. It seemed to me preferable that the prayer should be recited in the middle of the stage in front of the audience, and in this it appears that I was wrong; at all events, a well-known actress and one of great talent complained of this bit of stage management. Her suggestion was that Esther should hide her face in a cushion; that would give an idea of family prayers, and from the point of view of the public and the artistic producer I am sure she is right; but as I very seldom write plays and shall never own a theatre nobody need be seriously annoyed because I think everything outside of the text and the acting is mere vulgarity.

Act I

SCENE: *The servants' hall at Woodview. When the curtain rises,* RANDAL, WILLIAM, *and* SARAH *are on the stage.*

SARAH
Mr. Randal, can you tell us if the race 'as been run ?

RANDAL
Deuce take the woman ! [*Looks at his watch.*] The race was at three o'clock, and it is now on the stroke of five. I don't know why we 'aven't 'eard the result.

SARAH
Would they know it in Shoreham ?

RANDAL
I was down there 'alf an hour ago, and no paper had come in.

SARAH
Perhaps the 'orse 'asn't won, after all. If he was beaten the Gaffer wouldn't wire—would 'e, Mr. Randal ?

RANDAL
Don't let's hear about 'im being beaten. 'E couldn't be beaten. It's a cert.

WILLIAM
You 'ear what he says, Sarah ? He knows.

SARAH
None of ye knows. 'Aven't you often told me before 'orses were going to win and they came in last? You're always telling me that 'orses are——

WILLIAM [*Aside*]
Can't you see you're riling 'im? 'E's got a lot of money on the 'orse.

SARAH
I only wants to know if the 'orse has won.

RANDAL
You're thinking of the tuppenny-halfpenny sweeps—of the seven bob you'll win.

SARAH
If Man-at-Arms comes in first.

RANDAL
A lot of good them seven bob will do you!

SARAH
You mean that if Silver Braid is beaten there'll be an end to Woodview, and we'll all get the sack?

WILLIAM
That's about it. And my poor mother who 'as been cook 'ere for the last forty years——

RANDAL [*Getting up*]
She thinks of nothing but that seven bob.

WILLIAM
Sit down, Mr. Leopold. You see, women——

RANDAL
They oughtn't to 'ave been allowed into the sweep at all; only you're never 'appy except you 'ave a woman after you.

[*He sits down.*]

WILLIAM
A lot of good that seven bob will do you, Sarah! Your place is worth more than seven bob, ain't it?

SARAH
I was only thinking that if perhaps Silver Braid didn't win my 'orse might.

RANDAL
But why think of any 'orse except Silver Braid? She keeps on 'arping Man-at-Arms, Man-at-Arms——

SARAH
No, I don't; and if I do, I don't see what that's got to do with anybody. Why shouldn't I wish my 'orse to win. Where's the harm? Thinking won't prevent Silver Braid from winning, will it?

RANDAL [*Meditatively*]
I'm not sure of that.

WILLIAM
Well, I'll be off to Shoreham once more; perhaps the news has come in.

RANDAL
You'd better stay where you are; no news is good news. If the 'orse hadn't won, the Gaffer would 'ave wired.

SARAH
I should have thought that it would be just the other way round.

WILLIAM
Mr. Leopold knows; 'e knows, so what's the use in wearing my legs off going down to Shoreham? And in this heat! The horse has won by the length of the street, Sarah. He was tried to win from 'ere to Shoreham, wasn't he, Mr. Leopold? The race is over now. There's no reason why you shouldn't tell us.

RANDAL
No good comes of talking.

WILLIAM
But the race is over!

RANDAL
Yes, the race is over.

WILLIAM
He was tried with Nut Bush, wasn't he?

RANDAL
Yes, he was tried with the mare. Now that the race is over, I don't mind telling you he beat her at nine pounds.

WILLIAM
Beat her at nine pounds! Then 'ow was it that 'e didn't go up in the betting?

RANDAL
Ah, the Gaffer was wide awake for them! He went to the distance, he and Swindles——

WILLIAM [*To* SARAH]
Mr. Ward. I gave 'im that name.

RANDAL
Well, they were both at the distance; so every one thought the horses were being tried for the 'alf-mile. The mare won—there never was nothing so fast for the 'alf-mile—but the 'orse won at the three-quarters; and all 'e was getting was nine pounds. The mare is backed for the Cup for a 'eap of money, and she carrying nine stone. The 'orse is carrying six, and 'e can beat her at nine pounds. Think on it! the certainty the Cup would be for the mare with, let us say, seven stone on her back. She'd walk in! And the 'orse will walk in; 'e 'as walked in, I know it! I always know when a 'orse wins; something tells one. The only thing that can get Silver Braid beaten in that race would be——

WILLIAM
What?

RANDAL
The Demon 'as wasted so much that there mayn't be strength in him to ride a finish.

WILLIAM
The horse 'as won from 'ere to Shoreham!

SARAH
The Demon looked very poorly when he went away.

'E never used to have anything but a little tea—and how many doses of Epsom salts did I mix for 'im !

RANDAL [*Pensively*]
I always thought them two last pounds should have been left on 'im. Had I been the Gaffer I would have declared two pounds overweight. It was that walk you took 'im to Shoreham and back and two overcoats on 'im that brought off the two pounds ; and if anything has lost us the race it will be them two pounds. There'll be an enormous field of 'orses.

SARAH
I wish I'd seen that race. It would be something to look back upon.

WILLIAM
In old times all the servants at Woodview used to go to Richmond—usen't they, Mr. Leopold ?

RANDAL
Yes ; in old times the Gaffer used to drive a team. We all went in the drag.

WILLIAM
That was the year that Rosacrucian won the Goodwood Cup, wasn't it ?

RANDAL
Yes, that was it.

WILLIAM
Those were good times. I was only a little kid then, but I used to 'ear of them. But these are every bit

as good. The Gaffer never 'ad so many 'orses in training as 'e 'as now—'ad he, Mr. Leopold ?

RANDAL
No ; there are more 'orses now in Woodview than I ever remember. Six brood mares, two stallions, five yearlings—fifteen horses in training, ten flat-racers, and five chasers.

WILLIAM
Twenty-eight thoroughbreds and not one that you could put into the shafts except the old pony that takes the Saint to church.

SARAH
There's some hunters. Wasn't Ginger a-'unting all last winter ?

WILLIAM
Ginger never had a 'unter to ride to 'ounds in his life. He just rides the chasers and goes out schooling ; that's all Ginger's 'unting amounts to. It would be much better—don't you think, Mr. Leopold ?—if the Gaffer confined himself to the flat racing and got rid of the screws instead of trying to patch them up and turn them into chasers.

RANDAL
There's a good deal to be said for that. But then, what would become of Mr. Arthur ?

WILLIAM
It was Ginger what rode Nut Bush in the trial. Perhaps it was his riding that got the mare beaten.

RANDAL
Not a bit of it! Ginger or Mr. Arthur, whatever you likes to call 'im, can ride a finish as well as the Demon any day.

SARAH
We shall all know in another 'alf-hour's time. The news can't be later coming in than that; and if my 'orse wins, this will be the last week's work I'll do in Woodview—isn't that it, Mr. Leopold?

RANDAL
I think, Sarah, you had better go about your work. We'll let you know when the news comes in.
[*Exit* SARAH.]

WILLIAM
All the same, I'm thinking it's very odd we 'aven't 'ad a wire from Goodwood. I'm getting uneasy. The news must be in the evening paper. I think I'll be off down to Shoreham. What time did you say it was? Five?

RANDAL
If you 'urry you'll be in time to catch the six o'clock to Brighton.

WILLIAM
The six o'clock to Brighton! What are you driving at? Why should I want to go to Brighton?

RANDAL
I wouldn't keep her waiting if I was you. She's one of them testy kind—not the fair, but the dark jackdaw kind. They can caw-caw very prettily, but they can peck very 'ard at times.

WILLIAM
Who told you I was going to meet a dark woman? I suppose that's about what you're aiming at—isn't it? I don't mind your knowing it. I suppose everybody will know it to-morrow. There'll be a flare-up—won't there?

RANDAL
I expect there will.

WILLIAM
But if the 'orse has won it won't matter. They'll be all thinking of the money they've won—all except the Saint. I'm sorry to have vexed her, but after all one has a right——

RANDAL
To marry whom one likes?

WILLIAM
There never was such a man as you; impossible to keep a secret from you. Tell me now, how did you get on the track of this? I told her to change her 'andwriting on the envelope.

RANDAL
And you came down every morning to get the letters before I should see them.

WILLIAM
Every morning but one; it was that morning that did me. 'Ow did you manage it? You never go out except for that little walk in the morning between twelve and one, and you know everything. The Gaffer can't keep a trial from you, and you know the

pedigree of every 'orse right back to the time that Rosacrucian won the Cup twenty years ago. Now, how much do you stand to win on Silver Braid? Do you know, they say down in Shoreham that if Silver Braid wins you'll buy the land along the river's bank and put up a street?

RANDAL
The horse has won right enough. Why have you stayed on 'ere? Why didn't you go away with her?

WILLIAM
Well, we thought it out very carefully. She had to get some money and she couldn't get it at once; so, one thing or another, I said, "What does it matter, this week or next?" And I'd like to stay till after the race for the Cup was run, just to see how you'd all take it 'ere, and I have to get my money from old Watkins down at Shoreham . . . if the 'orse has won.

RANDAL
He has won.

WILLIAM
I'll have a tenner in my pocket. One doesn't like to go away with a woman without a penny—having to turn to ask her if she'll give one the price of a glass of beer wouldn't look very well the first day, would it? God! I can't stand it any longer; I must find out whether the horse has won.

RANDAL
Wait a minute. What are you going to do after you're married?

WILLIAM
We're going abroad for a bit, and then I think I'll start as bookmaker, a thousand pounds capital—she'll be able to put that into the business, and if we get on perhaps I'll 'ave a 'orse or two; and you may be sure, for old lang syne's sake, if there's a good thing going you'll know all about it. Now I must be off.

RANDAL
All this sounds very well for you and for—— [WILLIAM *makes a sign that the name is not to be spoken.*] But what about the poor girl you're leaving behind?

WILLIAM
What poor girl?

RANDAL
You know well enough who I mean—Esther.

WILLIAM
She's had nothing to do with me this long time. She's 'ardly spoken to me for the last month.

[*Enter* SARAH.]

SARAH
Silver Braid has won! Man-at-Arms second.

RANDAL [*Leaning against table*]
Won! Thank God that's over! If he hadn't—but I knew he would.

SARAH
He won by a 'ead—a short 'ead.

RANDAL
What a narrow shave! I think I must have a nip of something just to pull me together.

[*Goes into pantry. Enter* ESTHER *and* MRS. LATCH.]

SARAH
When is the money to be divided?

WILLIAM
If you're so keen on it, the money may be divided now. Here's Esther. There's no reason why we should wait for the others. Never did I see a woman so keen on tuppence-halfpenny as you are, Sarah! There was twelve—that's right, isn't it?—Sarah, Margaret, Esther, Miss Grover, Mr. Leopold, myself, the four boys, Swindles, and Wall. It was agreed that seven should go to the first, three to the second, and two to the third. No one got the third 'orse, so I suppose the two shillings that would have gone to him 'ad better be given to the first.

SARAH
Given to the first? Why, that's Esther! Why should she get it? What do you mean no third? Wasn't Soap-Bubble third?

WILLIAM
Yes, Soap-Bubble was third right enough, but 'e wasn't in the sweep.

SARAH
Why wasn't he?

WILLIAM
Because 'e wasn't among the 'leven first favourites.

We took them as they were quoted in the betting list published in the *Sportsman*.

SARAH
How was it, then, that you put in Silver Braid ?

WILLIAM
You needn't get so angry, no one is cheating. It's all above-board. If you don't believe us you'd better accuse us straight out.

SARAH
What I wants to know is why Silver Braid was included. He wasn't among the eleven first favourites.

WILLIAM
Oh, don't be so stupid, Sarah ! You know we agreed to make an exception in favour of our own 'orse. A nice sweep it would have been if we hadn't included Silver Braid !

SARAH
And now supposing Soap-Bubble 'ad won, what would have become of our money ?

WILLIAM
It would have been returned ; every one would have got his shilling back.

SARAH
And now I am to get three shillings, and that little Methodist or Plymouth Brethren there, whatever you like to call her, is to get nine ! Why should the two shillings that would have gone to Soap-Bubble if any

one 'ad drawn him go to the first 'orse rather than to the second ?

WILLIAM
Well, I can't tell you for the moment why, but——

SARAH
So you can't tell me ?

WILLIAM
Not for the moment. Mr. Randal will be 'ere in a minute.

SARAH
It's a cheat, that's what it is ! You don't take us for a lot of fools, do you ? Never in any place I ever was in before would such a thing be allowed—the footman going out with the kitchen-maid, and one of the Dissenting lot, too !

ESTHER
I'm not going to have my religion insulted. How dare you !
[*She starts out of her seat.*]

WILLIAM [*Detaining her*]
Never mind what Sarah says.

SARAH
Never mind what I says ! A thing like that who never was in a situation before. No doubt taken out of some 'ouse—rescue work, I think they calls it.

ESTHER
She shan't insult me ; no, she shan't !

SARAH
A nice sort of person to insult!

MRS. LATCH
Now, look you 'ere, Sarah Tucker, I'm not going to see that girl aggravated so that she may do what she shouldn't do, and give you an opportunity of going to the Missus with tales about her. Come away, Esther, come with me; let them go on betting if they will. I never saw no good come of it.

WILLIAM
That's all very fine, mother, but it must be settled, and we 'ave to divide the money.

ESTHER
I don't want your money; I wouldn't take it.

WILLIAM
You must take your money. [*Enter* MR. RANDAL.] Ah, there's Mr. Randal! 'Ere's Sarah quarrelling with us all, saying that the money that should have gone to the third 'orse should go to 'er and not to Esther. Now, to which 'orse should it go?

RANDAL
It must be divided between the two of them.

SARAH
Why should it be divided?

WILLIAM
Because Mr. Leopold says it. Somebody must decide it. Would you like to put the question to the heditor of the *Sportsman?*

SARAH
No, I wouldn't.

WILLIAM
Then, in the name of God, tell us what you do want!

SARAH
I want my money.

WILLIAM
Good evening, ladies! I've had enough of you for to-day; I'm going to finish my smoke in the pantry.
[*Exit* WILLIAM.]

MRS. LATCH
I don't know what we're all stopping here for; one would think there was no work to be done in this 'ouse. There's no money coming to us.
[*She goes out and is followed by the other servants, leaving on the stage only* RANDAL, ESTHER, *and* SARAH.]

RANDAL
Well now, Sarah, somebody must decide this. I think it ought to be divided, but we will refer it to the *Sportsman* if you like. And here, Esther, is your seven shillings that you won on the first horse. The two shillings in dispute we'll hold over. Won't that suit you?

SARAH
No, it won't. I want my money.
[*She goes to the door.*]

ESTHER
I don't want the two shillings, Mr. Leopold; give them to 'er.

SARAH [*From the door*]
I won't touch the money!

RANDAL [*Going to* SARAH]
Come now, Sarah, take your money.
[SARAH *goes out. Coming back to* ESTHER]
Has William told you he's leaving?

ESTHER
Leaving! Why is 'e leaving? They 'aven't sent him away, 'ave they? [RANDAL *shakes his head.*]
Then it is something to do with Miss Peggy?

RANDAL
Maybe; but if you see him before he leaves——
[*Enter* WILLIAM.]

WILLIAM
I've been looking for you everywhere, Mr. Leopold. Just a word in the pantry—will you?

RANDAL
Certainly.

ESTHER [*Detaining* WILLIAM]
William, I must speak to you.
[*Exit* RANDAL.]

WILLIAM
Mr. Leopold!

ESTHER
You can speak to him presently. You must speak to me now. There, you've got your bag. You're going. Why are you going ? Why are you leaving ? 'Ave they sent you away ?

WILLIAM
No, I 'aven't been sent away ; I'm leaving service.

ESTHER
What are you going in for ?

WILLIAM
Betting on the course, most likely. Later on perhaps a book on the big races. If I get on I shall join one of the big clubs in London.

ESTHER
And I shan't see you no more ?

WILLIAM
Don't say that, Esther ; I'll always look you up whenever I gets the chance. Shan't be able to come here, though.

ESTHER
Why not ?

WILLIAM
Well, you see, I shall be in London a good deal. Shall have to attend all the race meetings ; a bookmaker is always going somewhere, is always in the train, going to meetings all over the country. Betting in town isn't safe ; the only safe betting is on the course.

ESTHER
Why can't you come here ?

WILLIAM
Because—well . . . because of the Gaffer . . . leaving suddenly like this. . . . But there will be the Brighton meeting. You will come to meet me when I'm in Brighton ; and there are other meetings in Sussex where we may meet, not far from here, and whenever I get time you may be sure——

ESTHER
William, you're not telling me the truth. When you go away from 'ere I shall never see you no more. And you used to say once that you always wanted to see me. We was going to be married once—why have you changed like this ?

WILLIAM
I 'aven't changed ; it was you that changed. For a month you didn't as much as bid me good morning when we met in the passage.

ESTHER
It wasn't for so long as that, William.

WILLIAM
It must have been very nearly a month, and it's more than a month since we went out together.

ESTHER
You know why that was.

WILLIAM
There was no reason why you should pass me in the passage.

ESTHER
You said that after the Leger would be time enough for us to be married.

WILLIAM
I see nothing unreasonable in that.

ESTHER
Perhaps not; I'm sorry. I suppose I was jealous. But if you still care for me, that should make no difference.

WILLIAM [*Embarrassed*]
I'm afraid that's just what it 'as done.

ESTHER
It shouldn't 'ave, if you cared for me. [*They stand looking at each other.*] 'As it anything to do with Miss Peggy ?

WILLIAM
For goodness' sake don't speak so loud ! [*Looking round.*] Well, Esther, I must say good-bye now.

ESTHER
Why must you say good-bye ? I'll 'ave it out. Tell me why you must say good-bye. Are you going to meet her ? [*Pause.*] Are you ? You're not married to her, are you ?

WILLIAM
Well, Esther, I—I——

ESTHER
You are married to her ?

WILLIAM
Well, what could I do ? She wanted to marry me——

ESTHER
Oh, you liar ! You——

[*Catching sight of a large, sharp-pointed knife lying on the table, she snatches it up and rushes at* WILLIAM. *He retreats from her. Enter* MRS. LATCH ; *she catches* ESTHER'S *arms.* ESTHER *throws the knife ; it strikes the wall, falling with a rattle on a meat-screen. Escaping from* MRS. LATCH, *she rushes to secure it, but her strength gives way and she falls back in a dead faint.*]

MRS. LATCH
What have you been doing to the girl ?

WILLIAM
Nothing, mother . . . we had a few words, that was all. She said I shouldn't go out with Sarah.

MRS. LATCH
That's not true. I can read the lie in your face. A girl doesn't take up a knife unless a man wellnigh drives her mad.

WILLIAM
That's right ; always side against your own son. If you don't believe me, get what you can out of her yourself.

[*Exit* WILLIAM. ESTHER *opens her eyes and looks at* MRS. LATCH *questioningly.*]

MRS. LATCH
Are you better now, dear ?

ESTHER
Yes; but—but what—— [*Recollecting herself.*] Is he gone? Did I strike him? I remember that I——

MRS. LATCH
You didn't hurt him.

ESTHER
I don't want to see him again; far better not. I was mad. I didn't know what I was doing.

MRS. LATCH
You'll tell me about it another time, dear.
[*Enter* MRS. BARFIELD.]

MRS. BARFIELD
Where is William, cook? I want to tell him to go to the station to meet—— Why, what's the matter? The girl is ill!

MRS. LATCH
She was taken with a little faintness; she and William were having a few words, ma'am. I'll go and tell William your message. You want him to go to meet the master?

MRS. BARFIELD
Yes, to meet the six o'clock.

MRS. LATCH
Very well, ma'am. You're better now, dear?

ESTHER [*Rising*]
Yes, I'm all right now.
[*Exit* MRS. LATCH.]

MRS. BARFIELD
What is the matter, Esther ? You look quite dazed.

ESTHER
Nothing, ma'am, nothing.

MRS. BARFIELD
But something is the matter. My maid tells me that you are all quarrelling about how much money each should get out of the sweepstakes. I hope, Esther, you haven't been tempted to waste your money in betting like the others.

ESTHER
I didn't risk my money, ma'am ; it was against my wish that William put a shilling into the sweepstakes for me.

MRS. BARFIELD
Was it about that you were quarrelling ?

ESTHER
Not about that, ma'am.

MRS. BARFIELD
But you were quarrelling ?

ESTHER
Not exactly quarrelling, ma'am.

MRS. BARFIELD
But cook said you were ; and I see you've been crying. What is it all about, Esther ? I've heard of your walking out with William. There's no harm in that

so long as there's an understanding. You don't answer.

ESTHER
I'm not sure that I rightly understand you, ma'am.

MRS. BARFIELD
I mean that if you and William are going to be married.

ESTHER
There was some talk of our being married.

MRS. BARFIELD
But he has thrown you over—is that it ? I'll speak to him.

ESTHER
I don't think, ma'am, you'll ever see 'im again. He had just come to tell me that he was going.

MRS. BARFIELD
Going where ?

ESTHER
Going to join his wife.

MRS. BARFIELD
His wife !

ESTHER
He married Miss Peggy—Poynter, I think her name is—the young lady what was staying here last month.

MRS. BARFIELD
Married Margaret Poynter ! Her people when they

hear of this! And my husband! But it's too late to do anything now. So that's what you were crying about? You liked William very much?

ESTHER
Yes, ma'am, I liked him.

MRS. BARFIELD
Well, Esther, I'm sorry for you. I know how one takes these things to heart. One thinks that one is always going to be miserable; but time is a great healer. The wound heals though the scar may remain always.

ESTHER
I'm afraid that time will only make things worse for me, ma'am.

MRS. BARFIELD
Esther! Esther! Am I to understand—— [*She looks keenly at her.*] You mean that——

ESTHER
Yes, ma'am, that's what it is.

MRS. BARFIELD
I thought you were a good girl, Esther.

ESTHER
So did I, ma'am.

MRS. BARFIELD
Did you tell William?

ESTHER
It wasn't till three weeks ago that I knew for certain, and then we weren't speaking to each other on account of Miss Peggy. I was waiting for a chance to speak to 'im alone. Meanwhile 'e got married, and to-day when 'e told me that 'e was going away with his wife I was that overcome——

MRS. BARFIELD
But you should have told him.

ESTHER
Yes, ma'am . . . though there would have been little use then.

MRS. BARFIELD
Why didn't you tell me, Esther, three weeks ago ?

ESTHER
It wouldn't have made no difference, ma'am.

MRS. BARFIELD
And this has been going on—how long ?

ESTHER
Three or four months.

MRS. BARFIELD
So for three or four months you've knelt every Sunday in prayer ; you've sat by me for twelve Sundays learning to read and all that while——

ESTHER
If I'd told you, you'd 'ave sent me away, and I'd only a quarter's wages, and should have starved or gone and drowned myself.

MRS. BARFIELD
I'm sorry to hear you speak like that, Esther.

ESTHER
It's trouble that makes me, ma'am, and I have had a great deal.

MRS. BARFIELD
Why didn't you confide in me? I haven't shown myself cruel to you, have I?

ESTHER
No, indeed, ma'am, you're the best mistress a servant ever had; but——

MRS. BARFIELD
But what?

ESTHER
Well, ma'am, it's this way. . . I 'ated being deceitful, indeed I did. But I can no longer think of myself. There's another to think for now.

MRS. BARFIELD
Perhaps you're right, Esther; I couldn't have kept you on account of the bad example to the younger servants. I'm glad you didn't tell me, Esther; and, as you say, there's another to think of now. I hope you'll never neglect your child . . . if God gives it to you alive.

ESTHER
I hope not, ma'am; I shall try to do my best.

MRS. BARFIELD
My poor girl, my poor girl! you don't know what trial is in store for you. A girl like you and only twenty! Oh, it's a shame! May God give you courage to bear up in your adversity!

ESTHER
I know there's a rough time in front of me, but I'll get through it somehow. I've prayed to God and He will see me through it. And then my case isn't so bad as many another. I've nearly four pounds. I shall get on. One mustn't be down-'earted; and if you'll stand by me and not refuse me a character——

MRS. BARFIELD
Can I give you a character? You were tempted, you were led into temptation. I ought to have watched over you better. Mine is the responsibility. Tell me it wasn't your fault?

ESTHER
It's always a woman's fault, ma'am; but he should not have deserted me as he did, that's the only thing I have against him. The rest was my fault. I shouldn't 'ave drunk the second glass of ale; besides, I cared for him; that is how it was, I thought no harm and let him kiss me. He used to take me out for walks on the hill and round the farm; he told me he loved me and would make me his wife. . . . Afterwards he asked me to wait till the Leger was run, and that riled me, and I knew 'ow wicked I had been. I wouldn't go out with him or speak to him no more, and while our quarrel was going on Miss Peggy went after him. And that's 'ow I got left.

MRS. BARFIELD
You've been shamefully treated, my poor child. I knew nothing of this. So he said he would marry you if he won his bet on the Leger ? Oh, that betting ! I know that nothing else is thought of here, upstairs and downstairs. The whole place is poisoned with it, and it's the fault of—— I've seen it all my life, nothing else, and I've seen nothing come of it but sin and sorrow, and you're not the first victim. But the question now is about yourself. How much money did you say you had ?

ESTHER
Four pounds.

MRS. BARFIELD
How much do you reckon will see you through it ?

ESTHER
I don't know, ma'am. I think father will let me stay at home if I can pay my way. I could easily manage on seven shillings a week. When my time comes I shall go to 'ospital.

MRS. BARFIELD
Twenty weeks at seven shillings a week—about seven pounds.

ESTHER
But, ma'am, of course I shouldn't sit at home idle all the time ; I could go out charing and make an odd 'alf-crown that way.

MRS. BARFIELD
There will be your train fare, and you'll have to go to a room near the hospital. There will be the baby's clothes to buy. If I give you eight pounds, Esther ?

ESTHER
Ma'am, you're far too good to me.

MRS. BARFIELD
And about a character. It seems to me wrong to refuse. If I did, you might never get a place. I'm not certain if I am doing right, but I know what it means to refuse to give a servant a character. I can't take the responsibility upon myself to refuse.

ESTHER
Thank you, ma'am. I don't deserve such treatment. I know I don't.

MRS. BARFIELD
Say no more, Esther. I hope the Lord will give you strength to bear your cross. But, Esther, do you feel your sin ? Can you truly, honestly say before God that you repent ?

ESTHER
Yes, I think I can.

MRS. BARFIELD
Come, kneel down and pray to God to give you strength in the future to stand against temptation. [*They kneel down,* ESTHER *repeating the words after* MRS.

BARFIELD.] Dear Lord, Thou knowest all things, knowest how Thy servant has strayed and fallen into sin. But Thou hast said there is more joy in Heaven for one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just men. Therefore, Lord, kneeling here before Thee, we pray that this poor girl, who repents the evil she has done, may be strengthened in Thy mercy to stand firm against temptation. Forgive her sin even as Thou forgavest the woman of Samaria. Give her strength to walk uprightly before Thee, and give her strength to bear the pain and suffering that lie before her, and in the end receive her into Thy everlasting Kingdom for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

[*They rise from their knees. Enter* GINGER *and* RANDAL. *They are followed by the other servants.*]

GINGER

Randal and myself are going to drink to the health of the horse, mother, and I'm going to tell him how the race was won. All the servants must drink to his health. There'll be grand jollification to-night at the Shoreham Gardens. Everybody has won a bit. Won't you have a glass with us ? And Esther ?

MRS. BARFIELD

Esther is leaving.

GINGER

Leaving the day the horse wins ! I don't like that, mother. You're not sending her away ?

MRS. BARFIELD

She wishes to leave.

[MRS. BARFIELD *and* ESTHER *go towards the door.*]

GINGER
Try to persuade her to stay on. She'll miss the ball at the Shoreham Gardens. [*Exeunt* MRS. BARFIELD *and* ESTHER. *Calling after them.*] You'll find the Governor in the library, mother. It's a pity the girl is leaving on the day the horse wins. You know what I mean. It may bring us ill-luck.

RANDAL
I was thinking that myself, and she drew Silver Braid in the sweepstakes, sir.

GINGER
I must get mother to persuade her to stay on.

RANDAL
I'm afraid it will be no use, sir; I think it's about William.

GINGER
You mean . . . that?

RANDAL
I wouldn't go as far as that, sir.

GINGER
Threw her over? Well . . . I'm sorry. But can't you get that bottle open? I'm dying for a drink; never wanted one in all my life as badly as I do now. I shall be able to tell you about the race when I've had a glass of champagne. [*The champagne is opened;* GINGER *sits on the edge of the table,* RANDAL *stands on the other side, leaning against it.*] Here's to his health!

[*They drink.*] The most extraordinary race on record.

RANDAL
I thought the horse would have won easily, sir.

GINGER
There were forty-five of them—the largest field that ever faced a starter. You can imagine what a job it was to get them straight. There were two false starts. If there had been a third it would have been all up with us; the boy wouldn't have been able to stop the horse, and the Gaffer knew the danger. He stood watching, never taking his glasses from his eyes. "They're off!" he said. And it was a sight! I shall never forget it—a black line right across the course. And so they came for the first quarter of a mile. Just then the black cap and jacket came to the front; some one cried out "Silver Braid wins!" Never saw anything like it in all my life! He was six lengths ahead, and the others were pulling off. "Damn the boy! he'll win by twenty lengths!" said the Gaffer without removing his glasses. That was passing the plantation, within a few yards of the stand. At that moment it seemed to me that Silver Braid wasn't going so fast, and as the thought went through my mind the Demon looked over his shoulder. Seeing that he was losing ground, he took up the whip; but the moment he struck him, the horse swerved right across the course under the stand, running like a rat from underneath the whip. The Demon threw the whip across and hit him along the nose. I thought it was all up with us, for, seeing what was going on, the Tinman, who was on Man-at-Arms, sat down and began riding. I felt as if there was a lump of ice

down my back, and I don't know what the Gaffer felt like. I never saw a man go so deadly pale. It was the work of a moment, but that moment was more than a year, so it seemed to me. Well, about half-way up the rails the Tinman got level with the Demon; it was ten to one that Silver Braid would turn it up, or the boy wouldn't have the strength to ride out so close a finish as it was bound to be. The Tinman was riding splendid, getting every ounce, and something more, out of Man-at-Arms. The Demon, too weak to do anything, was sitting nearly quite still. It looked as if it was all up with us, but somehow Silver Braid took to galloping of his own accord, and, having such a mighty lot in hand, he won on the post by a head—a short head. I never felt that queer in my life, and the Gaffer was no better. I said to him just before the numbers went up, "It's all right, Governor, he's just done it." And when the right number went up I thought everything was on the dance, going for a swim. By golly! it was a near thing. Give me another glass. Fill out one for yourself. To-night will be a great night at the Shoreham Gardens. I'm sorry that girl is leaving.

RANDAL
Do you think, sir, the horse will win the Chesterfield?

GINGER
Win! Yes; but we shall have to take six or seven to one, and lucky if we get that. He'll start first favourite.

RANDAL
There will be the seven-pound penalty.

GINGER
That won't make any difference. The Gaffer will put up a stronger boy, which will more than compensate us for the extra weight. Come, now, Randal, here's to the health of the horse!

[*They drink.*]

[*Curtain.*]

Act II

SCENE : *Kitchen in a cottage. Door at back. Fireplace in the middle of the wall at back. A dresser, some chairs, and two cradles. One is empty.*

MRS. SPIRES *is on the stage when the curtain goes up. She goes to a cradle, takes the baby out, looks at it, and puts it back. A knock at the door. She goes to the door and opens it. Enter* CARRIE ROE.

CARRIE
Mrs. Spires, ain't it ?

MRS. SPIRES
Yes—at your service.

CARRIE
You don't seem to remember—Carrie Roe ? I brought you my baby to look after about two years ago.

MRS. SPIRES
So you did. Well, this is a surprise ! Won't you come in ? You're not in trouble again, I hope—though indeed I don't know why I should be saying that, for the cradles is all empty, and I 'ave no one to 'elp me now that my man's gone. I only gets two shillings a week from the parish.

CARRIE
No second children for me. Caught once, but not twice. It ain't one of my own this time but another woman's. I recommended you to 'er.

MRS. SPIRES
Well, that was kind of you. I did my best for your little one. It was convulsions that took it, if I remember right. But first of all tell me about yourself. You're looking well; never saw you looking better. You've been in a situation all this time, I hope, and in a good one too. I'm sure, any one would be glad to get you.

CARRIE
I am in the same situation still—parlourmaid in the Bayswater Road.

MRS. SPIRES
Yes, I remember you told me you left at the right time. No one knew nothing about it.

CARRIE
No one. I left my baby with you, and when I went back they were looking out for a parlourmaid, so I just walked in—a piece of luck, wasn't it? Twenty-four pounds a year.

MRS. SPIRES
It was hindeed; but then every one ain't as clever as you, Miss Roe. I'm glad to see you. It's a bit lonesome 'ere, a talk with you will do me good. Can I offer you anything? A cup of tea? I was just a-going to 'ave one myself.

CARRIE
Well, you see——

MRS. SPIRES
Ah, yes, I remember, you was telling me about a lady you was kind enough——

CARRIE
Yes, she's waiting for me at the corner of the street, and she has her baby with her.

MRS. SPIRES
You mustn't keep her waiting. [CARRIE *gets up.*] But one thing afore she comes in—is there money about ? Will she do as you did ? You gave me five pound, 'aving trust in me to find a 'ome for the child.

CARRIE
Well, Mrs. Spires, we ain't none too flush either of us at present, and I am 'elping her. You see, I thought that, being a customer of yours, you would just take a pound for the first month.

MRS. SPIRES
You 'aven't said yet 'ow old the baby is.

CARRIE
Only a fortnight ; but my friend has got an excellent place offered to her—a pound a week as wet-nurse. If you'll give her a little time all will come right.

MRS. SPIRES
You knows I never take children under a month old.

CARRIE
But you took mine.

MRS. SPIRES
Well, that was different ; you see, I 'ad confidence in you.

CARRIE
And you can have confidence in her. You must do this, Mrs. Spires. The woman is a particular friend of mine. She ain't got another in the world, and I have told her that she must either go to the work'us or into this situation. Once a woman has been to the work'us she's done, only lodging-houses for her after that. [CARRIE *moves towards the door.*] I'll go and fetch her. Better see for yourself.

[*She goes out.* MRS. SPIRES *goes to the cradle, begins rocking it; she hums an old song. Enter* CARRIE ROE *followed by* RACHEL BOYD.]

RACHEL [*Rocking the child in her arms*]
So, my little darling, we are to be parted for many a day—for many a day.

CARRIE
Rachel, you won't notice the time passing.

RACHEL
Notice the time, and away from my little one! It's when I'm with her that I don't heed the time.

CARRIE
You'll have another to look after, and your own will be doing very well with this kind woman, Mrs. Spires, who will give it every attention.

MRS. SPIRES [*To* CARRIE]
Your friend is one of them that sees nothing but the child at the breast.

CARRIE
I was like that myself; only, you see, there comes the pinch, one has to get one's living.

MRS. SPIRES
And a pretty tight pinch it is sometimes. [*To* RACHEL.] Do you want me to look after your baby for you ?

RACHEL
I suppose I do—what else ?

[*She stands staring, and then walks away rocking her baby.*]

MRS. SPIRES
Come now, what are we all standing about for when we can be sitting down ? It don't cost nothing, there's plenty of chairs. [MRS. SPIRES *and* CARRIE *sit down.*] You don't look as if you ought to have left the 'orspital so soon.

RACHEL [*Walking up and down*]
They turned us out on account of the spring cleaning.

MRS. SPIRES
They is a bit sharp about that spring cleaning; I think I 'ave 'eard of it afore.

CARRIE
But, Rachel, they were kind to you in the 'ospital; didn't you say so yourself ? And 'asn't the matron got you a place as wet-nurse ? Aren't you to get a pound a week ?

MRS. SPIRES [*To* CARRIE]
One can see that it's her first baby. If anything should 'appen to it, she would go dotty; she's pretty well out of her mind now. [*To* RACHEL.] Will you let me see your baby, miss ?

RACHEL
There, look at her, ailing a little now, crying since yesterday.

MRS. SPIRES
Lor', what a mite ! I'm afraid I can't take 'er.

RACHEL [*Turning suddenly*]
Why can't you take her ? Is she going to die ? If she were to stay with me she might live, but I can't keep her.

CARRIE
Of course she's not going to die, Rachel. Now, Mrs. Spires, you'll take her baby. What is the woman to do ? If her baby lives she'll be paying you five shillings a week for years and years maybe. The baby don't look much now, but worse-looking ones have lived. In this world nobody can tell what's going to live and what's going to die. It may be eighty years hence before that little thing with a head no bigger than an orange is laid in the grave.

MRS. SPIRES
Maybe ; but 'ow much are you going to give me to look after it meanwhile ?

CARRIE
If we give you thirty shillings ? We've got that.
[CARRIE *pulls out the money and shows it to her.*]

MRS. SPIRES
No, I couldn't do it for that money ; I couldn't undertake it.

RACHEL
My poor little darling, only a fortnight old and they're going to take you from me! Mother and child will never see each other again. What is the meaning of it all? No meaning at all. Better for us to go down to the Thames together, better for us; a little cold water and all the sorrow is over, better for us. What will you be without me, my poor little one? No one to care for a poor baby but its mother—its poor weak mother, and with all the world against her! My poor little one, poor little one—only me between you and the bleakest world that God ever made!

MRS. SPIRES
She looks as if she was off her 'ead.

CARRIE
Don't mind her. Aren't we all like this? Haven't you a boy of your own?

MRS. SPIRES
Yes, and a fine boy too, three-and-twenty years of age and doing well. 'E's driving a bread-van now.

CARRIE
That's a good thing. And now, Mrs. Spires, you'll look after this woman's baby for her? She'll give you as much as she can. She has no more now than thirty shillings, that is all that is left. She's giving you all she has, and I'll add ten shillings. You see, I am the only friend she has in the world. She's a bit queer now, but she'll be all right in a day or two. The recklessness wears off; she'll sober down; one child is the same as another at the breast. She'll be getting a pound a week, and I'll see that another sovereign comes to you within the next fortnight. Now, take

the money—take the money. [*She forces the money into* MRS. SPIRES' *hand.*] Now, Rachel, give your baby to Mrs. Spires; it will be well looked after, it will indeed. Come now, Mrs. Spires, show us the cradle you're going to put it in.

RACHEL
There's another baby here.

MRS. SPIRES
Yes, a fine boy, doing well, a little ailing 'e 'as been for the last few days, but 'e's doing well. 'Is mother is earning good money as wet-nurse in Mayfair. I was hup at the 'ouse this afternoon to tell 'er that 'er baby wasn't quite so well. I was sitting up with it till two last night. It's always better to let the mother know. Now you're not looking very strong yourself. I'll look after yours as I look after this one. Go to your situation and leave her to me.

CARRIE
Come, Rachel, don't think about 'er any more. See 'ow comfortable she is, how well she sleeps in that nice warm cradle. Come away, Rachel.

[*They go out.* MRS. SPIRES *chinks the money in her hand, looking at* RACHEL'S *baby.*]

MRS. SPIRES
A peevish little thing, not much life in it. Two pounds. If I were sure it was dying I'd 'ave in the doctor.

[*Goes to the fireplace and takes down a tin of milk; puts some into a jug. Enter* ESTHER.]

ESTHER
Where's my baby?

MRS. SPIRES
Lor', 'ow yer did frighten me, coming like that into other folk's places without a word of warning, without as much as knocking at the door !

ESTHER
I beg your pardon—but the message you left 'as that frightened me !

MRS. SPIRES
'Ow is that ? Don't you think 'e's safe in my keeping ? Well, look at 'im yourself. What a flurry you're in ! 'Ow did you get out of the 'ouse ? You may lose your situation, leaving Mrs. Rivers like that, and she paying you fifteen shillings a week.

ESTHER
Why did you come to tell me that my baby is ailing if there's nothing the matter with him ?

MRS. SPIRES
'E 'as been ailing a little.

ESTHER
Has the doctor seen him ?

MRS. SPIRES
The doctor !
[*The baby wakes.*]

ESTHER
Ah, there, he opens his eyes, he cries ! He wants his mother.
[*She takes the baby out of the cradle and opens her dress.*]

MRS. SPIRES
If Mrs. Rivers saw you now a-nursing of yer baby ?

ESTHER
I shouldn't care if she did. He's thinner than when I left him. Ten days without me 'ave made a lot of difference in him.

MRS. SPIRES
Well, yer don't hexpect a child to do as well without its mother as with her. But tell me, 'ow did yer get out ? You must have come away shortly after me.

ESTHER
I wasn't going to stop there and my child ill.

MRS. SPIRES
You don't mean to say that yer 'ave gone and thrown hup your situation ?

[*A knock at the door.* MRS. SPIRES *goes to it. Enter* MRS. RIVERS.]

MRS. RIVERS
Are you Mrs. Spires ?

MRS. SPIRES
Yes, ma'am.

MRS. RIVERS
Is my nurse here ?

MRS. SPIRES
Yes, ma'am.

MRS. RIVERS
Waters ! But you're nursing your child !

MRS. SPIRES
I told her, ma'am——

MRS. RIVERS
Why did you run out of my house without my permission ? When I engaged you it was on the understanding that you were to see your baby only once a month.

ESTHER
Yes, ma'am ; but that was if my baby was well. You see he's ailing, and you can't blame me for running to him.

MRS. RIVERS
I suppose not. But you are coming back with me ? [ESTHER *does not answer.*] If you don't, my baby will die.

ESTHER
I don't want to seem 'ard-'earted. If I might suckle the two of them——

MRS. RIVERS
Oh, I couldn't allow that.

ESTHER
Well, ma'am, why didn't you nurse your own child ?

MRS. RIVERS
I couldn't ; it wasn't my fault. I had no milk when baby was born. [*Turning to* MRS. SPIRES.] Can't you persuade her ? It was you that came upsetting her in my house.

MRS. SPIRES [*Dropping a curtsey*]
I'm sure, ma'am, I'm very sorry, but you see I 'as to be very careful ; in these days one 'as to be.

MRS. RIVERS
What am I to do ? It isn't honourable of you, Waters. You undertook to rear my child. Yours is doing nicely with Mrs. Spires.

MRS. SPIRES
Hindeed he is, ma'am.

MRS. RIVERS
Next time I engage a nurse I'll get one who has lost her baby and then there will be no bother.

ESTHER
I was wrong to go to you at all. I've been thinking it all out ; it is all so hidden up that the meaning ain't clear at first. The 'ousemaid told me you 'ad 'ad two wet-nurses before me and both their babies died.

MRS. RIVERS [*Going up the stage*]
I must go to the hospital and see if they can't recommend me another girl. It's the delay. [*Returning to* MRS. SPIRES.] Can you recommend me a nurse ? Do you know any one ?

MRS. SPIRES
Well, ma'am, there was one 'ere just now, but she was going into situation.

MRS. RIVERS
What's the use of speaking of her, then ? [*To* ESTHER.] If you don't come back I shan't pay you a shilling. You have no money.

ESTHER
I'll try to manage without. I shall take my baby to the work'us. However bad the living may be there, he'll be with his mother.

MRS. RIVERS
To-morrow you'll come to me and apologise. In the meantime my baby wants you. Are you going to her ?

ESTHER
I must stay with baby, ma'am.

MRS. RIVERS
So you shall—and you'd better send for your box. If you don't, I shall have it thrown into the street.

ESTHER
I dare say you'd be cruel enough to do that, if the law allows you—only be careful it do.

MRS. SPIRES
Let me open the door for you, ma'am. I'll try to persuade her.

MRS. RIVERS
A sovereign for you if you send her back to me this evening.
[*Exit* MRS. RIVERS.]

MRS. SPIRES
Well, you 'ave been going in for some rapid talk, you 'ave; going to the work'us. You won't care for that institution.

ESTHER
There, the child is going asleep now. I think he's had enough of the breast.

[*She puts him back in the cradle.*]

MRS. SPIRES
You haven't answered me. Do you really mean that you're going to the work'us ? What are you going to do with that 'ere box ? You'll find it on the pavement. And who's agoing to fetch it for you ? And where are you going to put it ?

ESTHER
I think he'll sleep now. How well he sleeps !

MRS. SPIRES
The girl's gone dotty over that kid of 'ers. Look 'ere, are you going to tell me what's to become of that box ? I've asked you three times within the last two minutes.

ESTHER [*Waking from her reverie*]
I don't know what's to become of me.

MRS. SPIRES
Take my advice and go straight back to her and ask her to overlook it this once.

ESTHER
She'll never take me back.

MRS. SPIRES
Yes, she will; yer suits the child, and that's all they thinks of.

ESTHER
I don't know what will become of me and my baby.

MRS. SPIRES.
No more don't I. Yer can't always stop in the work'us, and a baby will be a 'eavy drag on yer. Can't yer lay 'ands on his father some'ow ?

ESTHER
I'm all alone. I don't know 'ow I'm ever going to pull through.

MRS. SPIRES
Not with that child yer won't—it ain't possible. You girls is all alike, yer thinks of nothing but yer babies for the first few weeks, then yer tires of them, the drag on yer is that 'eavy—I knows yer—and then yer begins to wish they 'ad never been born, or yer wishes they 'ad died afore they knew they was alive. I don't say I'm not often sorry for them, poor little dears, but they takes less notice than you think for, and they is better out of the way ; they really is. It saves a lot of trouble hereafter. I often do think that to neglect them, to let them go off quiet, and I'd be their best friend. Not wilful neglect, yer know, but what is a woman to do with ten or a dozen ? And I often has as many as that. I'm sure they'd thank me for it. Do yer 'ear what I'm saying ?

ESTHER
Yes, I hear.

MRS. SPIRES
There's another girl I know, a servant like yourself. She's out nursing a lady's child, getting fifteen shillings

a week just as you was. She always brings her baby to me—delicate little things they is, that only live a week or two, but if they lived they'd be the ruin of their poor mother.

ESTHER
Don't she care for her babies ?

MRS. SPIRES
She do, but she's a sensible girl ; and where would she be now if they 'ad all lived ? Four of them there were, and instead of them costing 'er money they brings 'er in money. She's never failed yet to suit 'erself in a situation as wet-nurse.

ESTHER
And they all died ?

MRS. SPIRES
Yes, they all died, and she thanked me for it.

ESTHER
Thanked you for it ? What do you mean ?

MRS. SPIRES
'Ow is girls the likes of you and 'er to bring up a child on yer bits of wages, slaving sixteen hours a day in a lodging-'ouse ? For 'ow much do you expect to get ? Fourteen pounds ? Bring up a child on fourteen pounds a year ! I'll tell yer it ain't to be done. This one don't look as if it were much longer for this world, do it ? [*She takes the child and shows it to* ESTHER.] It goes to my 'eart, it do indeed, but Lor', it is the best that could happen to 'em. Who's to care for 'em ? And there's 'undreds and 'undreds of 'em ;

ay, thousands and thousands every year—and they all dies like the early shoots. It's 'ard, very 'ard, poor little dears, but they is best out of the way, they is only an expense and a disgrace.

[*She pours some milk into a baby's bottle and takes down a jug of water from the dresser.*]

ESTHER
But that's cold water ; it will give the baby gripes for certain.

MRS. SPIRES
I've no 'ot water ready, so I'll let the bottle stand afore the fire, that'll do as well. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if the poor little dear died before morning, it do look that poorly. Well now, what are you going to do ? Are you going to leave your baby with me, like a sensible girl, and go back to your situation where you'll be getting a pound a week ?

ESTHER
My poor baby !

MRS. SPIRES
Now, that's sensible. [ESTHER *begins to cry.*] What are you crying about ? Well, 'ave it out, one's always better for a good cry, I'm thinking ; as my 'usband used to say, after a few tears a woman sees things clearer some'ow.

ESTHER
I don't even know where I'll sleep to-night ; I've only thruppence and not a friend in the world.

MRS. SPIRES
Now look 'ere, if you listen to reason I'll talk to you.

You mustn't look upon me as a henemy ; I've been a good friend to many a poor girl like you afore now, and I'll be one to you if you're sensible-like. I'll do for you what I'm doing for the other girl. Give me five pounds——

ESTHER
Five pounds ! I've only a few pence.

MRS. SPIRES
'Ear me out. Go back to yer situation—she'll take yer back, yer suits the child, that's all she cares about—and ask her for an advance of five pounds. She'll give it when she 'ears it is to get rid of yer child—they 'ates their nurses to be a-hankering after their own, they likes them to be forgotten like ; they asks if the child is dead very often and won't engage them if it isn't. So, believe me, she'll give yer the money when yer tells 'er that it is to give the child to some one who wants to adopt it. That's what you 'as to say.

ESTHER
But who wants to adopt it ?

MRS. SPIRES [*With a wink*]
That's only what we says. Come, I'll take the child off yer hands for ever for five pounds ; and if yer likes to go out again as wet-nurse, I'll take the second off yer 'ands too, and at the same price.

ESTHER [*Taking the child from the cradle and holding him in her arms*]
You wicked woman ! Oh, this is awful !
[*She goes towards the door.* MRS. SPIRES *gets between her and it.*]

MRS. SPIRES
'Ere, 'old 'ard! What do you mean by talking to me like that? And because I offered to find some one who would adopt yer child.

ESTHER
You did nothing of the kind. Ever since I've been in your house you've been trying to get me to give you up my child to murder as you're murdering this poor little innocent in the cradle.

MRS. SPIRES
It's a lie! but I don't want no hargument with yer. Pay me what yer owes me and take yerself hoff. I want no more of yer. Do you 'ear?

ESTHER
I paid you what I owe you; you've 'ad more than your due. Mrs. Rivers gave you ten shillings for a doctor which you didn't send for. Let me go.

MRS. SPIRES
Yes, when yer pays me. [*Knock at the door.*] Who's that? Who's that?

FRED PARSONS [*Outside*]
Rent day, Mrs. Spires.

MRS. SPIRES
Oh, it's you, Mr. Parsons! I'm busy talking with a lady, and if it would be the same to you to come round in five minutes——

FRED PARSONS
You said that last week, and when I came back you was out, and I got no rent.

MRS. SPIRES
Oh, did I ?

ESTHER
Don't go away, sir. Sir, sir, she wants to take my baby from me.

MRS. SPIRES [*Her hand on* ESTHER'S *mouth*]
Will you stop yer clatter ? 'E's just one of those fellows who would bring the perlice down upon us.

ESTHER
Let me go.
[MRS. SPIRES *keeps her hand on* ESTHER'S *mouth.*]

FRED PARSONS
You'd better open, Mrs. Spires. Who is it I hear you talking to ? And whose baby ?

ESTHER
Mine.

MRS. SPIRES [*To* ESTHER]
Will you 'old yer tongue ! 'E's one of them religious lot.

ESTHER
Let me go.
[MRS. SPIRES *opens the door. Enter* FRED PARSONS.]

FRED PARSONS
Now, what's all this about ? The door fastened and two weeks' rent due.

MRS. SPIRES
It 'as nothing to do with the rent ; the rent is right enough.

FRED PARSONS
And this young woman ?

MRS. SPIRES
We was talking about some money she owes me for looking after her baby.

FRED PARSONS
I didn't know you took children in ; I thought it was washing.

MRS. SPIRES
Well, you see, Mr. Parsons, in these 'ard times one 'as to turn one's 'and to whatever comes along ; so now and again I takes one in, though for all the money they brings and the trouble they causes they ain't worth it. This young woman owes me money for 'er's. We was 'aving a few words about it, but I dare say she'll pay me what she owes, when she goes into situation.

ESTHER
No, I ain't going back to Mrs. Rivers, whatever you says. So let's part on that. And you, sir, will you point out the way to the work'us to me ?

FRED PARSONS
The work'us you'll find a hard home for you and your child, and if you have any friends——

ESTHER
I 'ave no friends, sir.

MRS. SPIRES
She's leaving a good situation at fifteen shillings a week.

ESTHER
If you'll point out the way to the work'us to me, sir.

MRS. SPIRES
Yes, Mr. Parsons, if you'll just point out the way to 'er.

FRED PARSONS
But I must know which parish you come from.

ESTHER
I've been in situation as wet-nurse for a fortnight, but I come from Lambeth, sir.

FRED PARSONS
Lambeth—why that is miles and miles from 'ere. You'll never find the way. If you come along with me—— Now, Mrs. Spires, if you'll give me the rent.

MRS. SPIRES
Eight and sixpence is what's owing, isn't it? [*She searches herself and seems unable to find her money.*] Now, it just comes to me that I wrapped it up in a bit of newspaper and left it on the corner of the chest of drawers upstairs. If one of you—— [*She looks at* ESTHER.] If you, Mr. Parsons, would be kind enough

to step upstairs—I've been suffering all the week from sciatica, and them stairs is my worst trial. Why, every morning I sits 'ere, sometimes till near midnight, afraid to face them.

FRED PARSONS
It was last Michaelmas, Mrs. Spires, you was laid up for so many weeks ?

MRS. SPIRES [*While talking she searches for matches and lights a candle*]
Your 'eart must be wonderful kind that you should remember all this while a poor woman's suffering.

FRED PARSONS
Well, you see, my mother is a great sufferer. There are weeks and weeks at a time when she doesn't get downstairs.

MRS. SPIRES
Fellow-feeling, sir. Now, 'ere's the candle, and remember you'll find the money on the left 'and corner. There's no missing it, eight and sixpence wrapped up in a bit of newspaper—two 'alf-crowns, one two-shilling-piece, one shilling, and sixpence in coppers. [FRED *goes upstairs. To* ESTHER.] Now's yer time ; off yer goes to Lambeth as 'ard as yer legs can carry you. 'E's one of them religious lot, and if 'e 'ears that you're not married 'e'll 'ave the perlice after you, and as likes as not you'll be charged for street-walking.

ESTHER
He spoke kindly enough and told me that he would put me on the right road again. I think I'll wait here.

MRS. SPIRES
Yer thinks you'll wait 'ere, do you? In my 'ouse after 'earing that we don't want none of yer sort about? Now, away you go, and don't loiter on the way, or else you may get run in for vagrancy. The perlice are pretty 'ard on the likes of you. [*She throws the door open.*] Stir yerself, the door is open now, and you was calling loud enough for it to be opened.

[*She tries to push* ESTHER *out.* FRED *appears at the top of the stairs.*]

FRED PARSONS
There's nothing on the chest of drawers that I can see. You'd better try to find the money yourself, and settle with me.

MRS. SPIRES
If you try again—perhaps on the chimneypiece.

FRED PARSONS [*Coming downstairs*]
Mrs. Spires, this won't do. You has the money or you hasn't.

MRS. SPIRES [*Searches herself again*]
Why, Lor'! it's 'ere. How stoopid of me! I'm that stoopid to-day with the sciatica!

[*She counts the money.* FRED *takes it.*]

FRED PARSONS
Now we're clear for another week. [*He writes a receipt, and after writing it stands looking at* ESTHER.] You said Lambeth, didn't you? And I suppose you have no money, not enough for a bus fare? Mrs. Spires says that you owe her money.

MRS. SPIRES
She do, and that's why I don't want 'er to leave the 'ouse ; the baby is my only security against the likes of 'er.

FRED PARSONS
But you can't keep her baby from 'er as security ? There are a good many cradles about here.

MRS. SPIRES
A good many empty ones. But come now, what business is this of yours ? You've got the rent, 'aven't you ? [FRED *looks into a cradle.*] That's the only one, a weak little thing that was brought in this afternoon. I does my best with them, and would 'ave made a fine child of this one [*pointing to* ESTHER'S *baby*] if it had been left with me. But what chance do I get when they brings them ailing ? Poor little hangel ! not long for this world. A poor 'ome for 'er if she lives ; a better one awaits 'er in 'eaven—if she was baptized. Poor little one, born in original sin ; not like you and me, sir, who was born in wedlock. [*She hands him a jug.*] If you'd like to baptize her, sir ?

FRED PARSONS
Baptize ! Oh, sprinkle her, you mean. That is not the way with the Lord's people. We must wait until it is a symbol of living faith in the Lord.

ESTHER
You belong to the Brethren, sir, I can see that.

FRED PARSONS
Are you a sister ?

ESTHER
Yes, when at Barnstaple, before we came up to London. My mother was married again, and died in her confinement when I was in 'ospital.

FRED PARSONS
You can tell me your story as we go along.
[*They go out together, forgetful of* MRS. SPIRES.]

MRS. SPIRES
Well, she's picked up another cove, and if I was only sure she wouldn't go on talking about what she 'eard 'ere—— But what can she say against me ? It was only talking. [*She looks at the cradle.*] Poor little thing, she wants 'er bottle. [*She is about to take the cold water, but stops.*] They didn't think it worth their while to baptize 'er. If I 'ad the words right I'd do it myself. " I baptize thee in the name of the Lord " —I don't know no more. I think I'll go upstairs and fetch the book. [*On the stairs she pauses.*] And she's gone away without paying me when she might 'ave 'ad it out of that cove. Oh, them religious swine are the 'ard-'earted lot !

[*Curtain.*]

Act III

SCENE : *The living-room in* MRS. LEWIS'S *cottage.* MRS. LEWIS *is sewing at the window. Enter* ESTHER.

ESTHER
I couldn't take my eyes off you as I came through the gate ; you looked that 'appy sewing in the sunlight. 'Ow are you, dear ?
[*She kisses her.*]

MRS. LEWIS
As well as can be expected. Just mending Jackie's shirt, letting it out. The boy grows that fast he'll be as tall as his father.

ESTHER [*Picking up a pair of trousers*]
These'll 'ardly hold the stitches any more, but 'e'll have to do the best he can. All my wages is gone for this quarter, and next quarter I'll 'ave to buy a new gown. I'm ashamed to be seen in this old one any longer.

MRS. LEWIS
You'll want some new dresses worse than ever now that Mr. Parsons 'as come along. When is it to be, Esther ?

ESTHER
It should be soon now. 'E's got the place up at the Mansions.

MRS. LEWIS
I'm glad of it.

ESTHER
So am I, for the collecting of rents up them lanes was 'eartrending at times, and I've known him pay the money himself sooner than have the poor folk turned into the street.

MRS. LEWIS
Them that rounded on him will learn what they have lost when 'e's gone. A kind-'earted man as ever I seed, and wonderful fond of Jackie—one who would be as good as a father to 'im.

ESTHER
You think so ? Perhaps it wasn't right to bring William up 'ere. A sort of feeling came over me when I saw 'ow Jackie and his father took to each other.

MRS. LEWIS
Law, Esther ! you're always looking round the corner thinking that somebody is coming along to trip you up. Where 'ave you left him ?

ESTHER
Who ?

MRS. LEWIS
Mr. Parsons.

ESTHER
Looking for Jackie ; he expects to find 'im up at the styes. You must stop 'im from going to see the pigs ; it's there he mucks 'imself, and I did want him clean to-day and ready to go with us. 'E's been looking

forward to this little treat since Easter, and Miss Rice was a-hurrying me out of the house, she thinks that much of the child; she wouldn't 'ave him miss an hour of it.

MRS. LEWIS
The first of the good sort it 'as been your luck to run across.

ESTHER
I should never 'ave pulled through if it 'adn't been for her 'elp. I've been through a 'eartless lot; but we must take the rough with the smooth, I suppose.

MRS. LEWIS
Only there's generally about twice as much rough as there's smooth.

ESTHER
So there is. But what's keeping Fred this long time? They ought to be back afore this.

MRS. LEWIS
'E won't find him up at the styes to-day; 'e's gone into Peckham.

ESTHER
By 'imself? 'E'll like as not be runned over; the boy ain't used to the streets.

MRS. LEWIS
Well, it's this way. Mr. Latch called 'ere this morning——

ESTHER
Don't say you let Jackie out with him !

MRS. LEWIS
'E said 'e would buy the boy a new pair of trousers, and knowing you was that 'ard up——

ESTHER
It's wonderful what a bit of money will do. The moment 'e set foot in this cottage you was curtseying to 'im, 'anding him chairs. I didn't much like it, but I didn't think you would round on me in this way. [*Turning suddenly on her.*] Who told you to let him 'ave the child ? Who pays you for his keep ? Answer me that. 'Ow much did he give you ? A new dress ?

MRS. LEWIS
Oh, Esther, I never thought you'd accuse me of being bribed, after all these years too !
[*She puts her apron to her eyes.*]

ESTHER
Is 'e coming back ?

MRS. LEWIS
In course he is, and will bring back Jackie with 'im.

ESTHER
And Fred Parsons 'ere to meet 'im !

MRS. LEWIS
That don't matter ; you've told 'im you met Jackie's father.

ESTHER
What was the use of telling him ? You 'eard all that was said between me and William last week, and his promise that 'e wouldn't 'ang about after the child. And now he comes behind my back and takes him to Peckham.

MRS. LEWIS
Only to buy him a suit of clothes.

ESTHER
There's to be no truck betwen me and 'im ; the boy is mine.

[*Enter* FRED PARSONS.]

FRED
Well, he ain't among the piggeries to-day. But now, Esther, what's 'appened ?

ESTHER
Oh, nothing.

FRED
And you, Catherine—all right ? [FRED *and* MRS. LEWIS *stand looking at* ESTHER.] Ain't she a funny girl ? One moment all sunshine and the next like a wet week.

ESTHER [*Moving towards the door*]
I'm going 'ome.

FRED
What about Jackie's treat ?

ESTHER
There ain't no treat for 'im to-day—nor for me neither.

FRED
Nor for me either. Now, Esther, what 'ave I done to you ?

ESTHER [*Coming back from the door*]
You may as well hear the truth : Jackie 'as gone out with his father.

FRED
So William 'as come back ? And you never said nothing ?

ESTHER
What was the use in telling you, when I thought he was gone clear away again ? Promises don't mean no more to that man now than they ever did.

FRED
Then he knows about Jackie ?

ESTHER
It slipped out when he bumped the jug out of my hand in the Avondale Road.

FRED
Bumped the jug out of your 'and ?

ESTHER
Yes, as I was a-going to fetch Miss Rice's beer. 'E knocked against me, and I let the jug fall. "Well, Esther," 'e says, "is it you ? I'm glad to see you again." "Are you, straight ?" says I to 'im, "so

much for that. Now your way and mine ain't the same. I wish you good evening." But when I came out again with a fresh jug 'e was waiting in the street, and followed me into the Greyhound, and when he put down 'is money to pay for the beer I says, "I like your cheek!" "And now," 'e says, "what 'ave you been doing all this while, Esther?" At that my temper got up, and I says, "Looking after your child." "My child!" he says; "so there is a child, is there?"

FRED
But 'ow did he find that Jackie was 'ere with Catherine? You didn't bring 'im here?

ESTHER
Yes, I did. 'Ave you anything to say against that?

FRED
Oh no; only it don't seem like you to give way to 'im.

ESTHER
I 'alf thought I'd like 'im to see what he had lost. If you don't think I did right, Fred——

MRS. LEWIS
Now, Esther, Mr. Parsons ain't never said nothing of the kind.

ESTHER
Who's saying he 'as? But now Fred thinks that I shouldn't 'ave brought William down 'ere—as if one could foresee that you'd let the child out with 'im!

FRED
It isn't a great matter 'is having the child out for a

day. Our marriage, Esther, will make an end of it. 'E can't come after you then ; I shan't be about for nothing. 'E deserted you and ain't got no call upon you, Esther, or the child. Don't worry yourself about him. When 'e comes back with Jackie I'll tell 'im.

ESTHER
So we've to stand 'ere till 'e chooses to bring my boy to me.

MRS. LEWIS
'Ere is Mr. Latch, and well, I declare !

ESTHER
What is it ?

MRS. LEWIS
Jackie ain't with him !

ESTHER
Ain't with 'im ! Now you see—what's 'appened to the boy ?

[*Enter* WILLIAM LATCH.]

WILLIAM
So you're 'ere, Esther.

ESTHER
Where's Jackie ?

WILLIAM
Gone up to the duck-pond to sail his boat.

ESTHER
What boat ? I never knew 'e 'ad one.

WILLIAM
I bought him a boat in Peckham.

ESTHER
We don't want none of your boats.

MRS. LEWIS
'E always mucks himself up there playing with them boys, rolling down the cinder-heaps together. Look at 'is trousers, sir.

WILLIAM
Well, it doesn't matter, Mrs. Lewis. I put him into a new pair of velveteen knickerbockers. [*Turning to* ESTHER.] I'm sorry now I let 'im go to the pond with his new clothes on. Why, law! what 'ave I done? I meant no 'arm. When Mrs. Lewis told me that he 'ad no clothes to go to school in, I took him into Peckham and got him a new suit.

ESTHER
Mrs. Lewis 'ad no right to come to you with tales about my boy. If 'e'd been waiting for you to clothe him 'e'd 'ave 'ad to wait many a long year. 'E must be fetched back at once. [*She goes towards the door.*]

FRED
Esther, I'll go and fetch the boy, if you'll let me.

ESTHER
Yes, Fred, do you go and fetch him.
[*Exit* FRED *and* MRS. LEWIS.]

WILLIAM
Who's that fellow, Esther?

ESTHER
It ain't none of your affair who 'e is. I suppose I'm the best judge of them I can trust my boy with ?

WILLIAM
I've said nothing again him.

ESTHER
It ain't for the likes of you to speak again the likes of 'im.

WILLIAM
Now, Esther, what's the use in being so snappish ? I 'aven't done no 'arm.

ESTHER
You beg and pray of me to let you see the child, and when I do you come 'ere on the sly.

WILLIAM
I thought you'd like to see him in a new suit of clothes.

ESTHER
A nice sort of mean trick !

WILLIAM
Esther, be fair. You wouldn't 'ave liked it if I'd come 'ere and turned up my nose at 'im and taken my 'ook and never seen him any more, would you ? [*She does not answer.*] I came up 'ere to see him, for I couldn't get 'im out of my 'ead. 'E's a trump, that he is, that child of ours—or yours, if you like it better—and I came 'ere, for I wanted to hear about you from Mrs. Lewis.

ESTHER
I'm no concern of yours.

WILLIAM [*Sitting down*]
The best bit of luck I 'ad this many a day was the day I knocked the jug out of your 'and. I just 'appened to have a bit of business with a friend who lives your way, and was coming along from 'is 'ouse, turning over in my mind what he had told me about the Stewards' Cup, when I saw you with the jug in your 'and crossing the street. "That's the prettiest girl I've seen since Esther and I parted," I said; "the sort of girl I'd like to see behind the bar at the King's Head."

ESTHER
The King's Head!

WILLIAM
I'll tell you about that presently; you see, you're that snappish you won't give me a chance to tell you nothing, and there's a good bit to talk about. Come now, Esther, sit down. You always keeps your figure; you know you ain't a bit changed, and when I caught sight of those white teeth I said, "La! why it's Esther!" and the moment I looked into your eyes I felt it 'ad been a mistake all along and that you was the only one I cared about.

ESTHER
A queer way you 'ave of showing it. 'Ow do you know that you ain't doing me 'arm by coming after me?

WILLIAM
You mean you're keeping company with that chap and don't want me?

ESTHER
You don't know that I'm not a married woman. You don't know what kind of situation I'm in. You comes after me just because it pleases your fancy, and don't give it a thought that you might get me the sack, as you got it me before.

WILLIAM
There's no use nagging. You listen to what I 'ave to say, and if you ain't satisfied you can go your way and I can go mine. You said I didn't know that you wasn't married, and if you're not, so much the better. If you are, you've only to say so and I'll take my 'ook. I've done quite enough 'arm without coming between you and your 'usband.

ESTHER
No, I ain't married yet.

WILLIAM
I'm glad of that.

ESTHER
I don't see what odds it can make to you whether I'm married or not. If I ain't married, you are ; you 'ave a wife of your own and children of your own.

WILLIAM
I have no children, and marriage is a poor lookout without children. Peggy knew all the time I was gone on you. We didn't hit it off, and for this reason or another she likes a fellow she met at Boulogne, and wants to get a divorce from me. I've been a bit lucky racing lately and have bought the King's Head in

Soho—regular custom, the same lot turn up every night to talk racing. Many of them would like to come round at midday if there was a joint on—roast leg of mutton, half-past one, shall we say, potatoes and veg., cheese and butter—1s. 6d. ?

ESTHER
My law ! what has all this got to do with me and Jackie ?

WILLIAM
A great deal, Esther. [*They look at each other.*] Can't you put two and two together and see that it makes four ? You are the mother of that child, I am 'is father, and it ain't unnatural that I would like you to come and live at the King's Head with me, so that we may put the pence together and have a tidy little sum to leave the boy.

ESTHER
Well, you 'ave a cheek if ever a man in this world 'ad one ! You come 'ere to ask me to go and live at the King's Head with you and you a married man ! Well ! [*Enter* FRED.] 'Ere you are back again, Fred, and you 'aven't come a moment too soon.

FRED
'Ow is that ?
[*He looks at* WILLIAM.]

ESTHER
But Jackie—couldn't you find 'im ?

FRED
Yes, I found 'im where this gentleman said 'e was ; up

at the duck-pond. 'E's with another boy, and they are so happy sailing the boat that I hadn't the 'eart to bring 'im back; he pleaded that 'ard to be left. You don't mind, do you, Esther?

ESTHER
Not when you say he's in no mischief. [*Pause.*] You two men don't know each other. Let me introduce you. This is Mr. William Latch, Fred, Jackie's father; and this is Mr. Fred Parsons, William. Mr. Parsons is going to marry me. So if you two 'ave anything to say to each other you 'ad better say it, for I don't suppose in time to come you'll see each other very often. [FRED *is about to speak.*] But before you begin there is one thing I must tell you, Fred. William came 'ere to ask me to go to live with him at the King's Head. Now did you ever hear of a cheek like that?

FRED
Perhaps, Esther, Mr. Latch didn't know that you and I was going to be married.

WILLIAM
This is the first I've heard of it. I asked Esther——

ESTHER
If I was married, and I said I wasn't.

WILLIAM
But you should 'ave said you was going to be.

ESTHER
And if I did I suppose you wouldn't 'ave asked me to go to live with you at the King's Head?

FRED
The King's Head? That sounds like a public-house.

ESTHER
And it is one, in Soho; William is a betting man too, Fred.

WILLIAM
There's no betting in the bar at the King's Head; all my betting is done on the course.

FRED
Betting on the course and betting in the bar; wherever there is betting there is evil. I wouldn't 'ave you understand that I hold with betting on the course, but them that goes to races knows what they 'as to expect.

WILLIAM
So them's your opinions, and of course everybody must abide by them. The world is just a blooming hegg that you'd put under your wing and 'atch, and the chicken that the likes of you would 'atch out would be tough picking. But the world 'atches its own chickens, and maybe there's one or two worse even than myself, who, I suppose, is pretty bad in your eyes. A lot of screeching and caterwauling against the poor man's glass of beer and his bit on a 'orse, and 'is pipe of tobacco too. [WILLIAM *takes out his pouch and offers it to* FRED.] You don't smoke, do you? [FRED *shakes his head.*] I thought not. Everything's wrong except chapel and prayers; betting, getting money out of other people's pockets. But there are many ways of doing that besides betting. What about

yer blooming plate that goes round the pews, and the sour looks that you throws at the poor chap who puts nothing in it ? Religion forks more money out of people's pockets than ever betting did, and precious little pleasure they gets for their money ; but a bet puts new life into a man ; whether the 'orse wins or loses, he 'as 'is money's worth. You knows, Esther, what I says is true ; you've seen them at Woodview waiting for the evening papers to see if their fancy is coming on in the betting. Man can't live without 'ope, and that's just what this fellow would take from 'im.

FRED
And their poor wives ! Very little 'ope they gets out of the bets the 'usbands make in public-house bars at night.

ESTHER
What about the boy that was 'ad up the other day and said it was all through betting which began by pawning his father's watch. You won't tell me it's right to bet with bits of boys like that.

WILLIAM
I see, Esther, 'e's been getting at you. You always was the religious sort. [*To* FRED.] The 'orse he backed won.

FRED
So much the worse. The boy will never do another honest day's work as long as he lives. When they win they 'as a drink for luck ; when they loses they 'as a drink to cheer them up. My life has been spent trying to combat these terrible evils.

WILLIAM
Now, Esther, since this chap of yours 'as been so kind and sympathetic about my affairs, will you tell me 'ow 'e gets his living ?

ESTHER
Mr. Parsons was a rent-collector, but 'e's given it up.

WILLIAM
Didn't like the job of tearing the three-and-sixpences, and the four-and-sixpences, and the five-and-sixpences a week out of some poor devil wot gets up at half-past five in the morning to drive a van, and comes home with a wet shirt on 'im, lucky if 'e gets a bite and a cup of tea, and goes out again and comes back wet. No, 'e didn't like the job.

ESTHER
'E's got the place of caretaker up at the mansions.

WILLIAM
What mansions ?

ESTHER
Ayrdale.

WILLIAM
Why, law ! that's up at Paddington ; I know them. All that property belongs to Lord Glassbrooke that 'as the biggest stud of 'orses at the present time. You see, you're all on the betting just as much as I am myself, Mr. Facing-both-ways.

FRED
I've got nothing to do with Lord Glassbrooke's race-horses. I 'ave to look after the mansions.

WILLIAM
'Ow do you know the mansions wasn't built with the money that 'is Lordship took from the bookies when 'e won the Derby with Heraclius ?

FRED
It is none of my business what his Lordship does with his money, so long as I don't do wrong myself.

WILLIAM
So long as you don't do wrong ? And wrong is what you pleases to think wrong, and right is what you pleases to think right, and nobody else is to have an opinion. But we 'aven't come 'ere to argue about betting, but to find out which of us is going to get Esther.

FRED
If that's what you've come for, you're on the wrong 'orse.

WILLIAM
Glad to see an improvement, Mr. Facing-both-ways. Well, it looks as if I was going to lose this race by a head on the post. You're going to marry him, Esther. Well, he may suit you ; as I said just now, you was always of the pious sort. I wish you luck. But I'm sorry for my boy.

FRED
Sorry because he ain't going to be brought up among

drinking and betting? He'll be brought up in the service of the Lord. I'll see to that.

ESTHER

To hear you two men talk, one would think that I didn't know what was good for my boy. Neither of you know nothing about it. It is the mother who is the best judge of what is good for her child; she's the one who 'as slaved for him, and then you men come along and think you can settle it all your own way with an argument about drinking and betting. I claims what I worked for with my own two hands, and will have no interference.

WILLIAM

Bravo! Esther, you've earned him.

ESTHER

And with the work of my hands, while you went your way, leaving me to find a 'ome for him; and that I did, and am still doing, asking no 'elp from nobody, no more than a fox with a cub does. It is the vixen he waits for, sitting up watchful when he thinks he 'ears her coming, and barking when 'e sees the rabbit in her mouth. She throws it down to him afore she's 'ad a bite out of it herself, letting the cub 'ave the best part, living 'erself on the scraps. That's the way we women do, plenty of us in the city of London, from daytime to dark, always thinking of the cub at home.

WILLIAM

But, Esther, you never told me there was going to be a child.

ESTHER
Much it would 'ave mattered to you even if I 'ad! You'd 'ave left me to go away with Miss Peggy.

WILLIAM
You've no right to say that, Esther.

ESTHER
When I brought you 'ere last week you asked me in the train what I 'ad been doing all these years. I didn't answer you, but I will now. Fred knows what I've been through; 'e'll tell you what I says ain't no lies. When you left Woodview, the Saint, as we used to call 'er, said she couldn't keep me on account of the other servants.

WILLIAM
You told 'er?

ESTHER
We did well to call her the Saint. I can't speak of her without tears a-coming into my eyes. She gave me as much money on my leaving as would see me through. The child was born in Queen Charlotte's 'Ospital, and all the money I 'ad was gone then, so there was nothing for it but to put Jackie out to nurse. Mrs. Spires—that's the woman I left 'im with—would have taken him off my 'ands for ever for five pounds, and set me free. It was this man 'ere that got me out of 'er 'ouse and showed me the way to the work'us.

WILLIAM
To the work'us?

ESTHER
Yes. Do that surprise you ? And I remained in it for many a day. And when I came out it was to travel London in search of sixteen pounds a year, which was the least I could do with. To get them I've worked sixteen hours a day in lodging-'ouses, beating carpets, scrubbing floors, lighting fires, emptying dust-bins, sleeping anywhere—they ain't particular where they puts a general servant to sleep, I can tell you. The food—any scraps that come down. I've borne all that, to say nothing of the shame and sneers I 'ad to put up with for the sake of bringing him up respectable. And what did he cost you ? A toy-boat and a pair of velveteen knickerbockers. And now you come wanting to share him. Is it fair, I asks ?

WILLIAM
I thought you'd like to see him dressed out, and his schooling—for his sake——

ESTHER
For his sake ! I like that, as if I 'adn't done enough for him, slaving myself all these years, and in rags ! Look at the gown I'm wearing, and the 'at on my 'ead ! Now, if it was any one else but you ! Just tell me, where do I come in ? I've played the game long enough. Where do I come in ? That's what I want to know.

FRED
You've lost all claim to the child.

WILLIAM
Now come, I can stand Esther jawing me, but I ain't

going to take if from you. You may be going to marry 'er, but it wouldn't be much of a task for me to throw you out of doors. I 'ave a deal of patience and can stint myself a lot for 'er sake, but——

ESTHER [*Coming between them*]
Now, William, you men aren't going to come to blows for me. Fred, you're to blame as well; for after all it is for me to decide.

FRED
Whether he is to 'ave the child? I'll say no more.

WILLIAM
You do well.

FRED
Esther, will you let me explain? It wasn't to come to quarrelling that I spoke, but only to put matters before Mr. Latch as straight as I could, for I wanted him to see that he had no right to come here after all these years asking you to go and live with him. You didn't tell me that he asked you to marry him.

ESTHER
Marry him? Why, ain't I told you that 'e's a married man?

FRED
And 'e 'as the cheek to come 'ere and ask you, the woman I've asked to be my wife, to live with him in a public-house bar, with him a betting man! To live in adultery!

WILLIAM
That's 'ow you puts it.

FRED
It's either true or false, and if it is false——

WILLIAM
It was to get a divorce from my wife, with whom I 'aven't been living for some time, that I asked Esther to come and live with me at the King's Head.

FRED
I orders you out of the house.

WILLIAM
Does the 'ouse belong to you ?

ESTHER
William, there must be no fighting here.

FRED
If he 'ad any spark of honour in 'im, when he heard that you were going to marry me 'e'd have taken his 'ook ; and if 'e 'ad any sense of right in 'im, 'aving once disgraced you, 'e wouldn't come back. Either he or I leaves this 'ouse.

WILLIAM
I don't give him no heed. You know, Esther, that I meant you no harm, that I intended to act fair by you and marry you as soon as I got my divorce. And the boy ; you'll think over whether you can let me see him or whether you can't. I loved you always

fondly, but things went wrong; things don't come out as we want in this world, and it's easy to make me seem a 'eartless fellow. But you knows that I'm not, and that's a great comfort to me. You're going to marry him; maybe you're more suited to him—I 'opes you are. And now, Mr. Parsons, I'll wish you a good even. You left my little son up at the duck-pond, didn't you? [FRED *nods.*] You don't mind, Esther, my going there to see 'im? I'll send him back to you for I think you'll like 'im in the velveteens I bought him. 'E does look that 'andsome in them that 'e'll make your 'eart leap when you sees 'im. And perhaps you'll think for his sake a bit kinder of his father. Now, which is the way?

ESTHER
I'll show you, William.

[*She goes to the door and points out the way to him. When she returns,* FRED *is walking up and down very angry.*]

FRED
Esther, you should 'ave told me all this before. This comes of hiding the truth from me.

ESTHER
What truth, Fred, did I hide from you?

FRED
You didn't tell me that you had met William.

ESTHER
But, Fred, I only seed you once since I met him, and then only for a few minutes.

FRED
All the same, a thing like this should 'ave been told to me; and coming 'ere you never said nothing about him.

ESTHER
But, Fred, I didn't know he'd be here.

FRED
But you knew you had brought him 'ere.

ESTHER
I don't see no 'arm in that.

FRED
No 'arm in bringing a scoundrel like that?

ESTHER
He ain't no scoundrel.

FRED
A publican and a betting man not a scoundrel! And what was he saying to you when I came in? Asking him to go and live with him in a public-house so that he might get a divorce from his wife. And that not a scoundrel!

ESTHER
I'm not thinking any more about it, Fred; I'm thinking of the happy day we 'ad looked forward to at the Palace, you and I and Jackie.

FRED
It 'as been spoilt by that man.

ESTHER
It's a pity, Fred, we didn't bring Jackie with us yesterday when we went up to the mansions. Those are fine rooms we're going to live in.

FRED
Yes. Wasn't I lucky to get the place? Thirty shillings a week, free rooms, coal and light, as good as one hundred a year to us. And you mustn't let what 'e said about Lord Glassbrooke's racing stud prey upon your mind. We'll be so 'appy there, the three of us. But one thing, Esther, I must insist upon: that you and Jackie shall never see that man again.

[JACKIE *is heard outside; he enters running.*]

JACKIE
Where's mummie? Oh, there. [*He runs to her.*] Father told me I was to come back at once, for you wanted to see me in my new clothes. Aren't they lovely, mummie? And I didn't soil them a bit.

ESTHER
Yes, darling, they are beautiful clothes. Don't 'e look lovely, Fred?

[FRED *does not answer.*]

JACKIE
And, mummie, my boat—look at it! It sailed beautifully on the duck-pond; and father says, if you'll let me go with him, he'll take me up to the Rye to sail it there. May I go with father, mummie?

FRED
Jackie, listen to me. You're not going to see your father any more.

JACKIE
But why, mummie ?

ESTHER
You mustn't ask questions, dear, you must do what you're bid.

JACKIE
Mummie, won't you let me go with father to sail my boat ?

ESTHER
Go and show your new clothes and your boat to Mr. Parsons. Fred, look at his boat ; don't spoil the little fellow's pleasure in it.

JACKIE
Isn't it a lovely boat, Mr. Parsons ? Look, it has got three sails ; it's a cutter-rigged boat, father told me that. Father knows such a lot about boats. Do look at it !

[*He pushes the boat into* FRED's *hand.*]

FRED
Don't plague me with your boat !

[*He takes the boat and dashes it against the opposite wall.*]

JACKIE
Oh, Mr. Parsons, why did you do that ? It's broke ; it'll never sail again, not even on the pond.

[*He begins to cry.*]

ESTHER
Why did you break the child's boat ? What 'arm was

'e doing ? Come, darling, I'll try to buy you another boat.

JACKIE
But, mummie, you're too poor.

FRED
I'm sorry, Jackie, for breaking your boat ; I'll buy you another. [JACKIE *turns away from him.*] Esther, I suppose I did wrong to break his boat—the passion of the moment, that man coming back and at such a time. The best way would be for us three to go into Peckham. I'll buy him another boat and 'e'll forget his father.

ESTHER
Forget his father like that ! Fred, you're very 'ard.

FRED
I tell you what I think is right, Esther. Jackie, will you come into Peckham with me ?

JACKIE
No, I won't go to Peckham. I don't want no boat from you. Father will give me a boat.

FRED
'E's very obstinate. Esther, will you tell him to come ? 'E mustn't be allowed to do what he likes.

ESTHER
But if the child doesn't wish to go, Fred ?

FRED
Don't you wish to come ?

ESTHER
No, Fred, he don't.

FRED
You're angry with me, Esther, now aren't you? What more can I do? I said I'd buy Jackie a new boat.

ESTHER
You shouldn't 'ave broken his boat, Fred. You won't go to Peckham with Mr. Parsons?

JACKIE
No, mummie; don't ask me.

ESTHER
You see what he says, Fred.
[MRS. LEWIS *comes in with the tea.*]

FRED
Do you want me to stay for tea?

ESTHER
Just as you like; but I'm very tired, I can't talk any more.
[*He puts on his hat.*]

MRS. LEWIS
What, going, Mr. Parsons, afore you've had a cup of tea? I've made some of the 'ot cakes you likes so well.

FRED
Thanks, Catherine, but I must get back to town. I'll

call, Esther, to-morrow, at the usual time, half-past seven.

[*She does not answer. Exit* FRED.]

MRS. LEWIS [*While she is arranging the table*]
Doesn't our little gentleman look fine in his new clothes, Esther ? But your boat, Jackie—what have you done ? Is it possible you 'ave broke it already ? Oh, you naughty boy !

JACKIE
No, Nannie ; Mr. Parsons broke my boat.

MRS. LEWIS
Mr. Parsons broke your boat ? Why did he do that, Esther ?

JACKIE
Because father bought it for me ; 'e don't like father. 'E says I'm never to see father again. But, mummie darling, we're going to see father again, ain't we ?

MRS. LEWIS
Jackie, you mustn't worry your mother any more. Come and have your tea.

JACKIE
But, mummie, is Soho far from here ?

ESTHER
Yes, darling, a long way. Why ?

JACKIE
Father told me that he had a public-house in Soho. I'd love to see father in his own public-house, mummie.

Will you bring me to see him ? Do, mummie, after tea. [ESTHER *takes* JACKIE *in her arms.*] You will mummie ? Nannie, won't it be lovely ? We're going to see a real public-house. And Nannie will go too, won't she, mummie ?

ESTHER
Yes, darling, we all go after tea.

[*Curtain.*]

Act IV

SCENE: *A room above the bar in the King's Head. The room is reached by a spiral staircase. A door. Two windows. Between the windows a tape in working order.* WILLIAM *is standing on a chair,* ESTHER *is standing near him; she holds a picture of a racehorse in her hands.*

WILLIAM
Now give it to me.

ESTHER
It was kind of Mr. Arthur to send you the picture. I likes a man not to forget his promises.

WILLIAM
The same 'ere; and with all that a man like him 'as to think of—a large stud of 'orses and his own riding. But he knew that we'd like to 'ave Silver Braid. It all goes back to him, and so we gives him the place of honour. The very spit of him! You drew him in the sweep at Woodview.

ESTHER [*Nodding*]
Has Mr. Arthur changed much?

WILLIAM
A bit sandier than he was, but I knowed him the moment he came up to speak to me. "Mr. Barfield," says I. "What, William! Never!" says he, and asks me what I was doing at Sandown. "Come to see the racing, sir, like yerself." He shook hands with me and we walked up the course together, talking of

old times. He knowed all about Peggy. She's married. I've forgotten the chap's name.

ESTHER
The one you kicked downstairs at Boulogne ?

WILLIAM
No, not him ; another. I can't think of the name. No matter. Now 'ave I got it straight ?

ESTHER
Tilt it a little to the right and you've got it. [*He tilts it.*] That's too much. [*He tilts it the other way.*] That's right.

[WILLIAM *jumps from the chair and he and* ESTHER *stand looking at the picture.*]

WILLIAM
Ginger remembered you. He wished us luck, took the address, and said he'd come in this morning if he possibly could. He said he might 'ave some business to talk to me about. Now, I wonder, Esther, what it might be. Perhaps to give me a commission to back some 'orse for him. I'd like to get in with one of the great stables. It was nice meeting 'im again. And what do you think ? Five minutes after I met Jimmy White. You remember him ? The little fellow we used to call the Demon—'e that won the Stewards' Cup on Silver Braid. Didn't him and you have a tussle together at the end of the dinner the first day you came down from town ?

ESTHER
The second day it was.

WILLIAM
You're right; it was the second day. The first day I met you in the avenue. I was leaning over the railings having a smoke, and you came along with a 'eavy bundle and asked me the way. Good Lor'! how the time does slip by! It seems like yesterday—and after all these years to meet you as you was coming to the public-'ouse for a jug of beer! And 'ere we are, man and wife, side by side in our own 'ouse, 'appy as the morning. You are happy, Esther? Say you are.

ESTHER
Why do you want to 'ear me say it? Don't I look like a happy woman?

WILLIAM
It's 'ard to say for certain. I see a troubled look in your face sometimes.

ESTHER
Do it surprise you, William? Ever since the Rose and Crown was raided I sees a 'tec in every stranger that comes into the bar. What would become of us? All that 'as to happen is to bet once with a plain-clothes officer and our licence will be forfeited.

WILLIAM
There's a risk, I know; betting on the course would be safer. But I should always be away from home. Now, own up, Esther, you wouldn't like that?

ESTHER
Perhaps I shouldn't, but——

WILLIAM
There's always risks, and, as yer know, if there was no betting there wouldn't be a soul in the bar ; hardly any one comes in but them that takes the odds. Esther, you ought to have married the other chap ; he'd have given you a great deal that I can't. Your heart ain't altogether in the life. The old bringing-up is always gnawing like a mouse behind the wainscot.

ESTHER
You think I'm not suited to the bar ?

WILLIAM
It's this way : the saint may not like the niche, but what would the niche be without the saint ? You see what I mean. The moment you leaves the bar the light goes out of it, and when you returns the light comes back with you, and every one wants to be served. " Beer don't taste as sweet served by any other hand." So I heard a chap say the other night, and gave him a pretty sour look ; though I dare say he meant no 'arm.

ESTHER [*Laughing*]
Lor' ! that poor chap with the long fair silky moustache !

WILLIAM
Ah ha ! you know the one I mean. Asking him if he thought the Burton was as good last month as this. I have an eye and an ear for what goes on.

ESTHER
Well, William, if I didn't pass a word with them what

would the bar be like? They might as well be in church.

[*Enter* WILLIAM's *barman.*]

BARMAN
There's a good many in the bar, sir. Shall I take their money?

WILLIAM
Do you know them all?

BARMAN
I think so, sir.

WILLIAM
Be careful to bet with no one you don't know.

BARMAN
And what about them that comes introduced by a customer?

WILLIAM
They're all right.

BARMAN
And what about them that 'as been in the bar pretty frequent of late?

WILLIAM
You'll have to be very careful; it will be better to let a bet go than—— You'll be careful?

BARMAN
Yes, governor, and I'll keep down the price.

[*Exit.*]

ESTHER
You shouldn't have told him to take the money, William.

WILLIAM
Nonsense, Esther; Teddy knows what he is about. He won't bet with nobody he don't know.

[*Enter* ARTHUR BARFIELD—"GINGER."]

GINGER
Good morning, William. Mrs. Latch, I presume?

ESTHER
Yes, sir.

GINGER
You've hardly changed. An inch or two more apron-string perhaps, but all for the better. I see you've got the picture hung up.

WILLIAM
We'd just finished hanging it when you came in, sir.

GINGER
Ah, it was a great day at Woodview when he won the Cup. Fifty-to-one chance, started at thirty. Do you remember, William, how the Gaffer tried him to win with twenty-two pound more than he had to carry? You were at Woodview at the time, Esther. Woodview was your initiation into racing. I suppose you've seen a great deal of racing since you've come to the King's Head?

ESTHER
No, sir; I've heard a great deal about racing, but I never saw a race run but once.

GINGER
When was that ?

ESTHER
We all went to the Derby last year and walked about the course till we was tired. My husband was betting on the course then.

GINGER
And he should return to it, or join one of the great clubs—Tattersall's or the Albert. He would be able to do commission betting. That's what I've come to speak to him about.

WILLIAM
We've got a nice sitting-room which I'd like to show you, sir. If you'll just step through. You'll be more comfortable.

GINGER
I'll see you again before I leave Esther. My mother will be glad to hear I've met you. She talks about you frequently.

WILLIAM
My wife often speaks of the Saint's kindness to her.
[GINGER *looks surprised.*]

ESTHER
That's what we used to call your mother at Woodview, sir ; and she is a saint. She is well, I hope.

GINGER
A little older, but well enough now that she has returned to Woodview.

ESTHER
She's been away, sir ?

GINGER
Oh, we've only just returned. Ever since my father's death I had been training in the north, with the worst luck imaginable. It wasn't until we went back——

WILLIAM
Esther would keep you talking all day about Woodview, sir, if you let her.

[*Exit* WILLIAM *and* GINGER. *Enter* JOHN RANDAL.]

RANDAL
Where's the governor ?

ESTHER
He's just stepped through.

RANDAL
Anybody with him ?

ESTHER
Yes ; Mr. Arthur.

RANDAL
Ginger ! Is he here ?

ESTHER
Did you want to see William ?

RANDAL
I wanted a word with him.

[*Enter* JOURNEYMAN *and* KETLEY.]

JOURNEYMAN
Good morning, John. [*To* ESTHER.] Two threes, ma'am. John, will you join us ?

RANDAL
No, thank ye, but if I might have a glass of milk.
[ESTHER *goes to top of stairs and calls down.*]

ESTHER
Teddy ! Two threes, Scotch.

KETLEY [*Laughing*]
Irish for me, please.

ESTHER
How stupid of me ! One Irish, Teddy, one Scotch, and a glass of milk.
[*She returns.*]

KETLEY [*To* JOURNEYMAN]
So you don't believe Cross Roads will win the Dee Plate ?
[JOURNEYMAN *takes out his pocket-book.*]

JOURNEYMAN
She couldn't win at the weights. [*Opens his pocket-book.*] Inquisitor gave seven pounds and a beating to Black Diamond, and Black Diamond beat Cross Roads. Now, how in God's name——
[RANDAL *comes over.*]

RANDAL
Still at yer studies.

JOURNEYMAN
You'd back a 'orse whatever weight he had to carry, provided of course you gets the straight tip.

RANDAL
One horse improves upon last year's running and another don't. Where are you then ? The handicapper lets in a horse that has been pulled—cleverly, of course ; they know how to do that job nowadays.

JOURNEYMAN
Yes, they do, and how to set stories going about trials.

KETLEY
That's what I've been saying all the way up the street. The weights has nothing to do with it, and no more has the tips straight from 'eadquarters.

[*Enter* BARMAN *with drinks. They go up the stage to meet him. Enter* GINGER *and* WILLIAM.]

WILLIAM
I'll attend to that little matter for you, sir.

GINGER [*Sees* RANDAL]
Hullo, John ! Very glad to see you again. Going strong and well, I hope ?

RANDAL
As well as may be, sir, for one that has been out of a job since Christmas. But I hopes to get the place of 'ead-waiter at a new restaurant opening in Oxford Street.

[RANDAL *and* GINGER *talk together.* WILLIAM *goes over to* JOURNEYMAN *and* KETLEY.]

WILLIAM
Mr. Arthur Barfield, the great steeplechase jock—he that rode The Gardener to victory last year at Liverpool.

[JOURNEYMAN *and* KETLEY *look admiringly at* GINGER.]

RANDAL
I don't know about next week's events, sir, but I've heard of something for the Cup—an outsider will win.

GINGER
Have you backed it ?

RANDAL
I would have if I had had the money. Things have been going very unlucky with me lately. But I'd advise you, sir, to have a trifle on. It's the best tip I've had in my life.

GINGER
Really ? So I will, and so shall you. I'm damned if you shan't have your bet on ! Come, what is it ? William will lay the odds. What is it ?

RANDAL
Briar Rose, the White House stable, sir.

GINGER
Why, I thought that——

RANDAL
No such thing, sir ; Briar Rose is the one.

GINGER [*Taking up a paper*]
Twenty to one Briar Rose taken.

RANDAL
You see, sir, it was taken.

GINGER
Will you lay the price, William—ten pounds to half a sovereign ?

WILLIAM
Yes, I'll lay it. [GINGER *takes a half-sovereign from his pocket and hands it to* WILLIAM.] You're good for a thin 'un, sir. [*Hands back the money.*]

KETLEY [*Arguing with* JOURNEYMAN]
I have heard that argument ; I know all about it, but it don't alter me. Too many strange things occur for me to think that everything can be calculated with a bit of lead pencil and a greasy pocket-book.

WILLIAM [*To* GINGER]
It's well worth hearing those coves arguing, sir.
[GINGER *moves towards them.*]

JOURNEYMAN
What has my pocket-book to do with it ? You wants to see my pocket-book ? Well, here it is, and I'll bet two glasses of beer that it ain't greasier than any other pocket-book in the room.
[*The tape begins clicking ; they crowd round it.* WILLIAM *reads out.*]

WILLIAM
The Dee Plate——

KETLEY
Cross Roads—I know it's Cross Roads.

JOURNEYMAN
Will you shut yer mouth ?

WILLIAM
Wheatear, Greensleeves, and President. Which of you backed Wheatear ?

JOURNEYMAN
I did. Now, Herbert, what do you say to your omens ? You were so damned sure of Cross Roads. Why didn't it come right ?

KETLEY
The omen is always right, but we ain't always in the state of mind for the reading of the omen. There are times when the mind is fresh like the morning, that's the time. It's a sudden light that comes into the mind, and it points straight like a ray, if there be nothing to stop it. Now do you understand ? The whole thing is in there being nothing to interrupt the light.

JOURNEYMAN
But if you can't read yer omens it all comes to the same thing—omens or no omens.

KETLEY
A man will trip over a piece of wire laid across the street, but that don't prove that he can't walk, do it, Walter ? I made a mistake, I know I did ; and if it will help you to understand, I'll tell you how it was made. Three weeks ago I was in this bar 'aving what I usually takes. It was a bit early ; none of you fellows had come in. I 'ad a nice bit of supper and was just feeling that fresh and clear-'eaded, as I was explaining to you just now is required for the reading,

thinking of nothing in perticler, when suddenly the light came. I remembered a conversation I had with a chap about American corn. He wouldn't 'ear of the Government taxing corn to 'elp the British farmer. Well, that conversation came back to me as clear as if the dawn had begun to break. I could positively see the bloody corn ; I could pretty well have counted it. I felt there was an omen about somewhere, and all of a tremble I took up the paper. It was lying just where your hand is, Walter. But just as I was about to cast my eye down the list of 'orses a cab comes down the street as 'ard as it could tear. We rushed out—the shafts was broke, the 'orse galloping and kicking, and the cabby 'olding on as 'ard as he could. But it was bound to go, and over it went against the kerb. The cabby, poor chap, was pretty well shook to pieces ; his leg was broke, and we'd to take him to 'ospital. Now, I asks if it was no more than might be expected that I should have gone wrong about the omen ? Next day, as luck would have it, I rolled up 'alf a pound of butter in a piece of paper on which Cross Roads was written.

GINGER
But if there had been no accident and you had looked down the list of horses, how do you know that you would have spotted the winner ?

KETLEY
What, not Wheatear ? And with all that American corn in my 'ead ! Is it likely I'd 'ave missed it ?

GINGER
And how about the Chester Cup ? Have you found the winner for that ?

JOURNEYMAN
Oh, he thinks he's spotted the winner right enough; though how in God's name——

KETLEY
I wish you wouldn't speak like that, Journeyman; it's offensive to my feelings.

JOURNEYMAN [*Laughing*]
Offensive to his feelings because he went to church last Sunday.

KETLEY,
You see, sir, I always hold with going to church, and last Sunday evening the missus and I went there, and I was falling asleep over the sermon, when I wakes up suddenly, hearing "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." I remembered Vanity was running for the Chester Cup, and I says to myself—"That's it!"

GINGER
So you've backed Vanity!

KETLEY
If Vanity doesn't win, I'll never believe in omens again.

WILLIAM [*To* JOURNEYMAN]
What odds did I lay you against Wheatear? Twenty-five dollars to one, wasn't it? Five quid. [*He gives* JOURNEYMAN *a note and searches in his pocket and takes out a handful of silver.*] And here's the original stake. [FRED PARSONS *is heard outside saying, "Is Mr. Latch in?" They all look up.*] Put that away. [JOURNEYMAN *puts away the money. Enter* FRED PARSONS. WILLIAM *goes to meet him.*] Now, who is this? What,

Mr. Parsons ! Well, Esther, how often have we asked ourselves when we should be honoured by a visit ?

FRED
Latch, I want a few words with you—quite private.

WILLIAM
If you'll wait here with Esther, I'll get rid of those chaps. [ESTHER *shakes hands with* FRED]. I hope I may have the honour of drinking a glass of champagne with you, sir ? And, John, you'll join us ? Ketley, Journeyman—two of my old friends, sir. [*They go out.* KETLEY *and* WILLIAM *are the last to leave the stage. To* KETLEY.] He ain't proud ; he'll shake hands with you in the bar.

[*Exeunt.*]

ESTHER
So, Fred, you've come to see me at last.

FRED
I'd have come before, but I wasn't sure that you would care to see me. There's nothing in common between us now, Esther ; you belong to a different world.

ESTHER
If it's only to reproach me you've come, Fred——

FRED
No, not to reproach you, but to help you if I can.

ESTHER
To help us ?

FRED
If I can. I belong to the Committee for the Suppression of Illegal Betting, and we've got information that betting has been carried on here. I've come to warn you. If it was found out that I had been here, I shouldn't be trusted again. But, Esther, I can't see you ruined without trying to save you.

ESTHER
It's very good of you, Fred; but what can I say? William will be back in a minute. You can tell him.

FRED
Yes; but now that we're alone I would like to try to persuade you to get him to give up this betting.

ESTHER
How can I, Fred? Situated as we are.

FRED
The wrong road is the only road. Esther, Esther!

ESTHER
No, Fred, no.

FRED
It's a sore trial to me to find you here in a public-house. It breaks my heart to see you here.

ESTHER
I believe you did care for me, Fred. I was sorry to break it off, you know I was, but it wasn't my fault.

FRED
Nor was it mine. If William hadn't come back that

day and taken out Jackie for that suit of clothes he'd have been too late. You remember, Esther, how I pitched Jackie's boat into the corner and how Jackie cried? If I hadn't let my temper get the better of me that day, I've often thought that it might have been different. But all that's over now. How is Jackie? Has he forgiven me? Does he ever speak of me?

ESTHER
Indeed he do, Fred; he often and often asks why it is that you never come to see us.

FRED
He's at school, I suppose?

ESTHER
Yes, at school every day, busy as a little bee. [*Enter* WILLIAM.] William, Fred has come to warn us that the house is being watched.

WILLIAM
There's nothing wrong with the 'ouse. What does he mean?

FRED
I've come to tell you, Latch, that a trap has been laid, or if it hasn't been laid already it will be.

WILLIAM
It's a lie; there's no betting here.

ESTHER
Fred has come out of kindness—don't you see, William?

WILLIAM
For your sake ?

ESTHER
Why not for my sake ? And he has just come so that you may stop the betting-men from taking money if any should come into the bar. Isn't that it, Fred ?

FRED
Yes. Your wife, Latch, is an old friend of mine, as you know well, and it was for her sake—though perhaps I have done wrong in coming here. But I couldn't help it.

WILLIAM
You spoke of a trap. Sending a plain-clothes officer to ask me if I would lay him the odds ?

FRED
It may be so—that, or some other trap. What I do know is that the house is suspected, and for Esther's sake I have come to beg of you to leave it. If you could only see the evil of betting I'm sure you would give it up. Every day brings to us a tale of fresh misfortune, a hearth ruined, the mother in the work-house, the daughter on the streets, the father in prison, and all on account of betting. There isn't a shop-boy earning eighteen shillings a week that hasn't been round here to put his half-crown on some horse. This house is the immoral centre of the neighbourhood. No one's money is refused. We can't let this sort of thing go on.

WILLIAM
Give the house up and turn my hand to what ? Are you and your committee going to keep me ?

FRED
It seems to me that if a thing is wrong it should be stopped. But I did not come here to argue with you but to warn you. There's one notorious character—a welcher, I think you call him—who is known to frequent this public-house.

WILLIAM
I allow no welchers in my bar. That cove you speak of is Bill Evans. He's hanging round here after Sarah Tucker, the girl wot was with Esther in situation at Woodview. She came to us for protection from him, and he suspects she's here.

ESTHER
We're keeping her until she can get a situation ; but she mustn't see that brute again.

WILLIAM
If he ever comes into my bar again I'll let him know for what ! [*A loud voice is heard.*] Who's that ?

A VOICE
Hi ! mister, are you there ?

WILLIAM
It's Bill Evans. Quick, Esther, don't let Sarah show herself ! [ESTHER *disappears through door on left.* BILL *enters.*] Now, what do you want here ? And who, I'd like to know, gave you leave to make free with my house ? I had you put out of the bar and now you've found your way upstairs. Out you go !

BILL
Now, mister, not quite so hasty. You have my wife here.

WILLIAM
Your wife! How do I know if you have a wife? I don't know your women; it's enough to know you.

BILL
A little more manners, if you please. My wife or my Poll—what does it matter? You know her well enough, since you were in Sussex together. And she's here, I know, a-hiding——

WILLIAM
It's pretty likely she is hiding, wherever she is.

BILL
She's my wife; it's none of your business what I does to her.

WILLIAM
Your wife! When did you get married to her, I'd like to know.

BILL
In Brussels.

WILLIAM
And was it in Brussels you sent her out on the streets to get money for you?

BILL
She told you that?

WILLIAM
It's none of your business what she told me. Brussels isn't the same place as here, and the police over there——

BILL
It don't suit you very well, mister, to talk of the police to me. Perhaps they'll be knocking at your door before they find time to come knocking at mine. Do you 'ear ?

WILLIAM
Yes, I 'ear.

BILL
Well, are you going to give me back my wife ?

WILLIAM
She ain't here.

BILL
That's a lie ! Come, are you going to fetch her, or shall I beckon the boy in blue ? He that's waiting at the corner.

WILLIAM
What do you want her for ?

BILL
A man has a right to his own wife. [*Enter* ESTHER.] 'Ere you, missus, have you any news of Sarah for me ?

ESTHER
She's a long way from you wherever she is.

BILL
A jolly girl Sarah ; one I won't be parted from for all the money in your till.

ESTHER
She's not here.

[BILL *sidles towards the door* ESTHER *has come through.*]

WILLIAM
Come back from that door.

BILL
Ah ! so she's in there, is she !

[*Door opens and* SARAH *appears.*]

SARAH
Is that you, Bill ?

BILL
Well, what do you think ? Come and have a look if you ain't sure.

SARAH
Leave me here for a bit longer.

BILL
But you see I'm that tired every minute I'm out of your company.

SARAH
Don't make me go to-day ; I've been ill.

BILL
Come now, quick step, none of that nonsense ! What are you waiting for ?

WILLIAM
Now then ; no one raises his hand to a woman in my 'ouse.

BILL
'Ere, you shut up.

SARAH
I'll come with you ; I'll get my hat. [*Exit.*]

BILL
Well, now, that bit of business has been settled to my satisfaction ; there's just one other little thing to do.

WILLIAM
And that is to take your 'ook.

BILL
I'm not going to worry you, I like you too well for that—if it wasn't for the damned bad luck I've had ever since our return. Now, what would you say to a little bet ? I've a good tip for the Chester Cup. How much will you give ?

WILLIAM
Is that all you have to say to me ?

BILL
A quid—twenty-five to one.

WILLIAM
You aren't worth a quid, nor yet a thin 'un ; a tanner, or the change out of one—three coppers.

BILL
I'm good for a quid sooner or later, though you did take my wife from me.

ESTHER
William don't want to have nothing to do with you.

BILL
Look 'ere, missus, you folks have taken my wife and taught her to say her prayers, and to look on me as 'ardly worth the change out of a tanner ; three coppers, 'e said. Don't you think you might do something for me ? I'm tired of the life I'm leading and I want to start afresh in a new country. Now, what do you say, governor, to a loan of twenty-five pounds ?

WILLIAM
Well, that's a good one! Lend the likes of you twenty-five quid !

BILL
Well, governor, I'm tired of the old country, and you say you don't like to see me hanging round 'ere. Don't you think it would serve your turn to have me out of the way ? Me and Sarah might sail for a new country and a new life.

WILLIAM
A new life ?

BILL
Yes, a new life ; only a matter of five-and-twenty quid. Now then, governor, we've been cackling long enough. Cough up. Five-and-twenty.

WILLIAM
Why should I give you money ?

BILL
Cough up at once. We're only wasting time.

WILLIAM
You'll get nothing out of me that's worth your while.

BILL
Then you'll choke, that's all.

WILLIAM
What do you mean!
[SARAH *appears with her hat on.*]

BILL
Never mind. You just give me the money smart, that's all.

WILLIAM
I'll see you damned first!

BILL [*Putting on his hat*]
So long, then, boss! I must be going 'ome to write a letter to the boy in blue that's been yearning his heart out this long while for some news of this 'ere 'ouse.

WILLIAM
So peaching is your game, is it! Out you go!

BILL
Come now, five-and-twenty pounds.

WILLIAM [*Taking him by the shoulder*]
Out you go!

BILL
Hands off, mate, or it will be the worse for any one that comes interfering with me!

WILLIAM [*Pushing him towards the stairs*]
Get out of this, you dirty cur, low ponce, back to Brussels !

BILL
'Ere, easy now !
[*They struggle.*]

ESTHER
Try to get your man away.
[SARAH *and* ESTHER *try to separate them.* WILLIAM *pushes* BILL *down the stairs and he is heard falling.*]

WILLIAM [*On the staircase*]
Two seconds I give you to get out of my bar. Or do you mean to wait for me to pitch you out ? A swine like you only fit for Brussels porkshops ! You won't go ? We'll see about that.
[*He goes down the stairs.*]

SARAH [*Clinging to* ESTHER]
Esther, he'll kill me—he'll kill me to-night !

ESTHER
They're fighting now. Blows, more blows. What was that ?

SARAH
I heard nothing.

ESTHER
It was like a groan. There, again. Somebody is being killed. Fred, come ! [*She rushes towards* FRED.] Come, for he may be killing my husband !
[BILL *rushes in brandishing a knife.*]

BILL
Keep off, or it will be the worse for you. [*Looking round.*] Where does that door lead to? Keep off, or I'll serve you as I served him.

[ESTHER, SARAH, *and* FRED *struggle with him.* BILL *deals* FRED *a heavy blow, tears himself away from* ESTHER, *who throws herself before the door. Two policemen enter.* BILL *turns on them, but is quickly disarmed.*]

ESTHER
What has he done in the bar, for I heard a fall and a groan? My husband—has he been hurt by this man or stabbed?

FIRST POLICEMAN
A man is lying on the floor in the bar, under the counter near the door.

SECOND POLICEMAN
A tall man.

BILL
That's he; God rest his soul. But it was done in fair fight.

ESTHER
Husband! Stabbed! [*Turning.*] Dead! [*She runs down the stairs.*]

BILL
I say that it was done in fair fight, and with my last breath. I did it, for he had me by the throat and I should have strangled.

FIRST POLICEMAN [*Indicating* SARAH]
Who is this ?

BILL
She's my Poll; and a very good Poll she's been to me; one that will soon forget the hard words. Perhaps once or twice I did knock you about—and if I did put you on the streets——

SARAH
You couldn't starve, Bill. I'll go to the station with you.

[*Exeunt* CONSTABLES, SARAH, *and* BILL. FRED *is left alone; he sinks into a chair. A moment after, enter* GINGER.]

GINGER
Hello! What's the matter ? Hurt ? [FRED *tries to get up*] No, sit down.

FRED
I shall be all right presently. A glass of water.

[GINGER *pours some water into one of the glasses.*]

GINGER
Now, drink this. Has he had his knife into you too ?

FRED
A blow—only a blow.

GINGER
A pretty heavy one. Drink some more. He'll hang for this.

FRED [*After drinking*]
You said somebody would be hanged ?

GINGER
It was Bill Evans that struck you, wasn't it ?

FRED
Hang ! Why should they hang him ? I'm not dead.

GINGER
No ; but William died on the way to the hospital.

FRED
I don't think I understand. I'm still a bit dazed.

GINGER
Sit quiet. Have some more.
[*He holds the glass to his lips and sprinkles his face.*]

FRED
And Esther—where is she ?

GINGER
Gone to the hospital.

FRED
Is she ill ?

GINGER
No, no ; you'll hear all about it presently. You're sure you're not seriously hurt ?

FRED
No, no ; let me think. Bill Evans was trying to escape through that door ; we stopped him. The

police—— I remember now. You say William was stabbed and that he died on the way to the 'ospital ? The man Evans will be hanged. But Esther—what will become of her ?

GINGER
I'm afraid there are hard times in front of her. She won't be able to carry on the business.

FRED
And will have to face the world again—she and her boy. You see, I knew her from the beginning, she and her child.

GINGER
So there is a child ?

FRED
Yes, Jackie. [*He gets up.*] You're a stranger, then. I thought that you were one of the betting men about the place.

GINGER
No ; I am Arthur Barfield. Esther and William were servants at Woodview a long time ago, and I hadn't seen William for years till I met him last week at the races. Now do you understand ?

FRED
Esther often spoke to me of Woodview and of you and your mother.

GINGER
My mother used to think a great deal of Esther, and

was very sorry when she had to leave Woodview. Now what are you thinking of ?

FRED
I am just trying to think that perhaps your mother might be glad to have her back—if it wasn't for the boy. If she would leave Jackie with me, it might be managed that way. What do you think ?

GINGER
Very likely it could. But you're talking too much. You really must sit down and keep quiet.

FRED [*Sinking back*]
But tell me, what will become of Esther ? Shall I tell her that—— ? I have forgotten.

GINGER
That my mother will be glad to see her ? Yes, you can tell her that. Have some more water.

FRED
No, no ; I'm coming round.

GINGER
You will if you stop talking. You've received a heavier blow than you think for.

FRED
I'll rest here till Esther comes back. I dare say Jackie will soon be home from school.

[*Enter* KETLEY, JOURNEYMAN, *and* RANDAL.]

GINGER [*Going to the door*]
Well, John, this is a bad business.

RANDAL
Very bad, sir, very bad.

JOURNEYMAN
You didn't see the fight, sir ? William was having the best of it till the fellow got out his knife, and he must have got in somewhere about the heart, for there was hardly a groan.

KETLEY
A moan ; he moaned and turned white as my shirt.

JOURNEYMAN
Do you know the chap yonder ? He seems pretty bad. Did Bill get the knife into him too ?

GINGER
No ; only a blow of a fist. He'll be better presently. I'll ask the doctor to come round and look at him.

[*Exit* GINGER. *The tape begins clicking ;* KETLEY *and* JOURNEYMAN *go to it.*]

RANDAL
Which is it ?

KETLEY [*Reading*]
Chester Cup—V-A-N—[*The tape stops*]—Vanity !

JOURNEYMAN
It may be Vanguard ; he's in the race. [*The tape begins again.*] I-T-Y.

KETLEY
Vanity ! I knew I was right ; the omens is always

right; it's we who aren't always in the humour to read them. What did you say? That at the weights Vanity couldn't win?

JOURNEYMAN
Well, you've got your vanity, and it would be hard to find a greater vanity than a bet with a dead bookmaker.

RANDAL
Briar Rose—a straight tip, I thought. [*Hopelessly.*] Luck will never come my way again.

[*Curtain.*]

Act V

SCENE: MR. ARTHUR BARFIELD'S *room at Woodview. There are saddles, spurs, boots, &c., lying about. Pictures of race-horses on the walls.* RANDAL *is moving about the room;* JACKIE *is standing watching him.*

RANDAL
You had better be off to school; it's half-past eight.

JACKIE
I've still ten minutes. Please finish the story.

RANDAL
Well, you might as well clean these spurs while you're waiting. [*He hands him a pair.*] Where was I? At that moment the Demon looked over his shoulder——

JACKIE
You're leaving out something. You told me that Mr. Barfield didn't want the horse to win by twenty lengths.

RANDAL
Of course not; otherwise they would be laying odds on him for the Chesterfield. No one wants his horse to win by twenty lengths.

JACKIE
Then why did the Gaffer turn pale when he saw the Demon look over his shoulder?

RANDAL
Because if a horse isn't giving out his running——
But I can't tell the story if you stop me.

JACKIE
Well, don't be waxy. Go on—from when the Demon took up the whip.

RANDAL
The moment the Demon struck the 'orse he swerved right across the course, under the stand, and, seeing what was happening, the Tinman sat down and began riding.

JACKIE
The Tinman was riding Bird-Catcher ?

RANDAL
You're out there. He was riding Man-at-Arms. About half-way up the rails the Tinman got level with the Demon. It looked as if it was all up ; but Silver Braid took to galloping of his own accord, and having such a mighty lot in hand, he won on the post by a head—a short head.

JACKIE
And if Silver Braid hadn't won, what would have happened ?

RANDAL
It's 'ard to say. The Gaffer would have been a busted flush, and the horses would have been sold and the place shut up.

JACKIE
It wasn't the first time that a horse saved Woodview.

RANDAL
Not by a long chalk. When Rosacrucian won the City and Suburban the bailiffs were trying to get in here.

[JACKIE *goes over and looks at a picture.*]

JACKIE
Rosacrucian is the horse I'd like to ride.

RANDAL
The 'andsomest horse that ever was seen at Newmarket Heath. The bookies said, " Why, he's only a harab ! " and laid twenty to one against him.

JACKIE
Was Rosacrucian before Silver Braid ?

RANDAL
Years before.

JACKIE
And were you here when all these horses won ?

RANDAL
Yes, I was with the Gaffer when Don Louis—that one over there—was nobbled, and that's forty year ago. It must be quite that.

JACKIE
What's nobbled ?

RANDAL
A week before the Cambridgeshire was run they got into his stable.

JACKIE
Who ?

RANDAL
Parties that didn't want him to win ; and they put a bandage round his leg and hit him all the way down with a ruler—that's how it was done.

JACKIE
Shame ! They ought to have been hanged.

RANDAL
We were up night and day stuping the near fore leg.

JACKIE
And he won all the same ?

RANDAL
Yes, and by a dozen lengths.

JACKIE
That was bad riding.

RANDAL
It didn't matter ; we knew he would never stand training again.

JACKIE
You had a near squeak with Ben Nevis ?

RANDAL
We had more than a squeak, we was done that time. The owner of the second horse lodged an objection on the ground that the Gaffer had not paid his forfeits. The Gaffer was had up before the stewards of the Jockey Club. He died soon after, and Mr. Arthur took it into his head that Woodview was unlucky, and went away to train in the north.

JACKIE
Did you go with him ?

RANDAL
No ; I went to London to try my luck. And damned bad luck I had ! And damned bad luck followed Mr. Arthur into the north, all the horses breaking down or running second. Them were his very words to me in the King's Head the day that your poor father was killed. He says, " John, I couldn't stand it any longer, so I sold the place up and am back in Woodview again training on the Downs. After all we had better luck there than anywhere else. If you like to come to Woodview again you can."

JACKIE
And he brought mummie back too ; so you're all the same as years ago, only I wasn't here then.
[*He goes to the window.*]

RANDAL
My young man, I think it's about time you started for school. Have you the spurs finished ?
[JACKIE *hands him the spurs.*]

JACKIE
I have a few minutes still, and there's no use my going until I know if Chimney Sweep has won his trial. Mr. Barfield can't be long now. [*He takes up his school books and swings them by the strap.*] I wish he'd hurry. He'll come in pretty muddy, I reckon. They goes through some plough as they come round by Summersdean. While you're taking off his spurs and his gaiters he'll be telling you about the trial, how Chimney Sweep finished, and his chances for the National. When you go up in the morning with his clothes and his 'ot water you remains in his room for ages talking of the entries, the gallops and the trials—so they says in the stables.

RANDAL
They says more than their prayers in the stables.

JACKIE
I wonder, Mr. Randal, if he'd let me valet him—I mean when you're dead.

RANDAL
When I'm dead !

JACKIE
That won't be for a long time, I know ; but——

RANDAL
But what ?

JACKIE
Wouldn't it be nice if you was to send me to Liverpool to valet Mr. Barfield, if you're not going yourself ?

RANDAL
Send you to valet Mr. Barfield! Mr. Barfield is very particular about his top-boots, and it isn't every one that can bring up a pair of tops that he'll pull over his legs.

JACKIE
But you could teach me. You said yesterday that the boots I cleaned wasn't half bad for me.

RANDAL
Blacking a pair of laced boots is one thing, and I admit that you did get a fair polish on them for a kiddie like you; but tops and Mr. Arthur's tops! The tops he'll pull on the morning of the Grand National is—well, quite another pair of boots.

JACKIE
But you could teach me. Tops is cleaned with cream, and you've got the recipe in your wonderful press in the pantry. You might give it.

RANDAL
The recipe?

JACKIE
Well, a little of the cream. You will, won't you, if Mr. Barfield takes me to Liverpool with him? I'd love to go! Is there any chance, do you think? I'd see the race from the stand. The black jacket and cap going over the fences and the horse coming up to the brook—the great black Chimney Sweep tearing at it and Mr. Barfield a-steering of 'im. The sight would be that fine I'd go out of my wits.

RANDAL
I think you would.

[*Enter* GINGER. *He is dressed in riding breeches. Throws himself into a chair.* JACKIE *puts his school books aside and whispers to* RANDAL, "*May I take off his spurs?*" RANDAL *nods.* JACKIE *goes over to* GINGER.]

GINGER
That horse Chimney Sweep is a brute to ride—pulling all the way, three miles, twenty fences, his head low down, swinging it over the ground, sawing at the bit; a wonderful fencer, the finest I ever rode, never laid an iron on anything, and won easily. But I say, Jack, I hope you don't repeat down in Shoreham anything you hear up here.

JACKIE
No, sir; they never gets nothing out of me.

GINGER
Gad, I am tired!

RANDAL
You're looking a bit white after your ride.

GINGER
And I'm feeling a bit white, I can tell you, and what I'm thinking is that if I get the pounds off I may be too weak to ride a finish, just as I was when The Gardener was beaten.

RANDAL
But the year he won, it was your riding that did it.

GINGER
I knew he was going well within himself, so I kept on and they never caught me. [*Getting up and going over to the picture.*] A great old horse! Another big dose of salts and a long sweating walk should rid me of them; a little hot tea when I come in, and for dinner a lean cutlet.

JACKIE [*To* RANDAL]
Mr. Randal, won't you speak for me?

GINGER
What is this? What is he asking you?

RANDAL
He wants me to send him to Liverpool to valet you; he'd like to see you jump the brook, and if you're thinking of giving up riding, sir——

GINGER
He won't have another chance. Do you know, John, I think that the coming Liverpool will be the last time I shall ride. It's getting flesh off that is so awful; yet there was a time when I was as light as he is. [*He lifts* JACKIE *up.*] Not more than five-seven. What do you think, John?

RANDAL [*Taking up* JACKIE]
About what you says, sir; five-six or seven.

JACKIE
Silver Braid didn't carry much more when he won the Cup. Was it five-ten?

GINGER
He was in at five-ten, but he carried six stone ; the boy couldn't get off the last two pounds.

JACKIE
Then I'm too heavy ?

GINGER
No ; you're about five-seven.

JACKIE
But with the saddle and bridle ?

GINGER
One rides the weight that one stands ; the clothes that one takes off counterbalance the saddle and bridle. Look at that saddle ! I've ridden many a race in it, but I'll never ride it again. Far from it ! And here's the bridle. A couple of pounds, and the boots three or four ounces. [*Taking out a racing cap and jacket.*] How would you like to be taught riding, Jack ? Here's the cap and jacket the Demon wore. [*Puts the cap on* JACKIE's *head.*] Now for the jacket !

JACKIE [*Getting into the jacket*]
What about the breeches ?

GINGER
You can have the breeches on if you like. We might get him into the breeches, John. They'll just about fit him.

[*Enter* ESTHER. *On seeing* JACKIE *in the cap and jacket she stands unable for a moment to find speech.*]

ESTHER
I beg your pardon, sir ; I was looking for Jackie. It's time for him to go to school.

GINGER
Very likely it is, Esther, but it won't matter if he's a few minutes late. You've just come in time to see him in the cap and jacket the Demon wore when he won on Silver Braid. [*He picks up* JACKIE.] And about five-seven, Esther, and we want a new lightweight in the yard. But you don't seem pleased. What is it ?

ESTHER
I think he'd better go to school, sir.
[*She takes the cap off* JACKIE's *head and the jacket from his shoulders and hands them to* RANDAL.]

GINGER
Esther, I can't allow anybody to dictate to me in my own house.

ESTHER
But your mother promised me, sir, that he should go to school every day.

GINGER [*Signs to* RANDAL *to withdraw.* RANDAL *and* JACKIE *go out*]
The boy is getting on for fourteen.

ESTHER
It wasn't of his schooling I was thinking.

GINGER
You didn't like to see him in the jockey's cap and jacket—is that it ?

ESTHER
Yes, sir.

GINGER
And why, may I ask ?

ESTHER
I didn't intend him for a jockey, sir.

GINGER
I thought I was doing the lad a good turn ; most parents would jump at the chance I am offering Jack.

ESTHER
I dare say they would, sir ; but then that's perhaps because they haven't seen as much of racing as I have.

GINGER
The same old song ! It seems never to die out of my life. As soon as my mother has dropped singing it, you take it up.

ESTHER
I have only my boy, sir ; he's all I have.

GINGER
But what are you thinking of putting him to ? Have you any idea ?

ESTHER
Not exactly, sir.

GINGER
What do you mean by not exactly? Randal will teach him to wait at table, but he's too small for a footman; he's just the right size for a jockey. He won't begin to put on flesh for years; his father was always a thin-gutted fellow. Jack will be able to ride seven stone for a long while, and if he should happen to ride the winner in a big race or two he'll be drinking champagne with lords.

ESTHER
I don't think, sir, I would like him to drink with lords, or anything like that.

GINGER
The same old song ever since I can remember. Well, what do you want to do with him?

ESTHER
Nothing that you would approve of, sir.

GINGER
Well, let's hear it.

ESTHER
Fred Parsons——

GINGER
Another of the singers, the same old song, one of them

that thinks everything in life wrong except chapel. Where is he now ?

ESTHER
He's timekeeper at the dockyard in Portsmouth, and he has been looking out for something for Jackie. He wrote last week saying that a messenger-boy was wanted.

GINGER
Eight shillings a week ?

ESTHER
That's it, sir.

GINGER
And does Jackie agree to all this ?

ESTHER
Well, I haven't spoken to him about it yet.

GINGER
And when do you intend to speak about it to him ?

ESTHER
He'll have to know about it this afternoon. Mr. Parsons is coming up from Portsmouth to take Jackie back with him for a day or two ; that is, if you can spare him.

GINGER
Does my mother know about this ?

ESTHER
She read Parsons' letter for me, sir.

[*Enter* MRS. BARFIELD]

GINGER
Mother, I was just going to send for you. We want your advice.

[*He wheels a chair forward for his mother.*]

MRS. BARFIELD
About what, my dear Arthur ?

GINGER
About Esther and her boy. I'll just tell my mother what has happened, Esther. I'd come in from riding, mother. You'll be glad to hear Chimney Sweep won the trial ?

MRS. BARFIELD
And you're going to ride him at Liverpool ?

GINGER
My last race, mother. I'm getting too heavy. I can't stand this wasting any longer ; every bit I put into my mouth turns to tallow under the ribs. Well, I had come in from riding, and you know we're short of a boy in the stables ; we want a light-weight. As Jackie was taking off my spurs I looked up, and half in fun I said, " Why, that's just the fellow we want. Let's see how he'll look in a cap and jacket." We took out the Demon's cap and jacket and put him into them. It was then that Esther came into the room

and without a word took the cap and jacket off and said that Jack must go to school.

MRS. BARFIELD
Well, you know, Arthur, we promised her that he should go to school in the morning and work in the pantry in the evenings.

GINGER
But that's not the point, mother. Esther doesn't mind him working an odd day in the pantry and missing his school ; what she doesn't want is for him to become a jockey. She thinks a messenger-boy in the dockyard would suit him better. I said to her, " Well, you may be right and you may be wrong, but it seems to me that the boy shouldn't be considered like a box or a trunk at a railway station with a label on him ' Portsmouth.' He should have his choice." But no. Esther got a letter, it appears, from that very, very pious man, more chapel-going than you ever were, my dear mother, even in your worst days, to whom everything is wrong except going to chapel.

MRS. BARFIELD
It really seems to me, Arthur, that this is a matter between Esther and her son.

GINGER
But the boy should be consulted and not flung into something that he may have no taste for, and which, as I told you, Esther, leads nowhere.

MRS. BARFIELD
Esther, what do you think ?

ESTHER
We've seen so much racing, ma'am, you and I——

GINGER
The old song, the old song.

MRS. BARFIELD
No, my dear boy, I'm not going to sing any old song to you any more. You see, Esther, when we have been in life for a long time the edges get worn away, we become like pebbles in a brook. It isn't that I am less God-fearing now in my old age than I was when I was a girl; I hope there has been no backsliding; but one isn't so anxious as one was to reform the world. One feels that to be impossible, and that perhaps if we could reform it we mightn't be as well pleased with it as we thought for. We didn't make the world, Esther, and if the world is what it is, it is because God intended it so. My son keeps a racing stable, and he is as honourable in his calling as any other man in his. He has been a very good son to me, Esther, and I don't think that he would advise you to do anything wrong.

ESTHER
Then you think, ma'am, that——

GINGER
Esther, please to understand that I don't propose to make a jockey of the boy against his will.

MRS. BARFIELD
I think, Esther, Mr. Barfield is right. You might regret it very much afterwards if you sent him away to Portsmouth without his consent.

GINGER
And sending him with that nasty, cantankerous, narrow-minded little bigot.

MRS. BARFIELD
Don't speak of Mr. Parsons like that, Arthur. Remember he is Esther's friend and has stood by her when there was nobody else to stand by her.

GINGER
I'm sorry, Esther.

ESTHER
It doesn't matter, sir, it doesn't matter. I suppose he should be given his choice. But there was William——

GINGER
There are mishaps always, Esther. Besides, William was a betting man, and racing and betting aren't the same thing. I'm glad to see that she's coming round to my view. You really can't send him off to run messages. Mother, you'll speak to her.

[*Exit* GINGER. ESTHER *takes a duster and begins dusting some furniture.*]

MRS. BARFIELD
Then, Esther, it's understood ?

ESTHER
I suppose so, ma'am.

MRS. BARFIELD
But what is the matter, Esther ?

ESTHER
I don't know how I'm going to tell Parsons, ma'am. He has set his heart on getting the boy this place.

MRS. BARFIELD
But Jackie may choose to go to Portsmouth.

ESTHER
I'm afraid not, ma'am; he's grown too fond of the stables. He thinks of little else but horses.

MRS. BARFIELD
But no matter what choice he may make, you'll stay on here with us, Esther, won't you? . . . Or did you think of marrying Mr. Parsons?

ESTHER
He has waited for me so long.

MRS. BARFIELD
And would you like to marry him?

ESTHER
Well, ma'am, this is the way it is. I've been working hard ever since I was fifteen, and when a woman has worked for twenty years she feels that the time has come for a little rest in her life, and she would like to have somebody to look after her; that's all, ma'am. That's all. And then there's just the wish to make somebody happy. Fred has waited for me all his life. It seems hard that he should be disappointed in the end.

MRS. BARFIELD
But he ought to be able to see that the boy must be given his choice.

ESTHER
'E don't think like Mr. Arthur. It will seem to him like saying you have your choice to go the right way or the wrong way.

MRS. BARFIELD
I was like that once myself. It was always the right way and the wrong way.

[*Enter* RANDAL.]

RANDAL
Somebody has come to see, Esther, ma'am.

MRS. BARFIELD
Mr. Parsons ?

RANDAL
That's the name he gave, I think.

MRS. BARFIELD
Will you show Mr. Parsons up here, John. [*Exit* RANDAL.] You had better see him here, Esther ; you'll be undisturbed, and I'll send Jackie to you.

[*Exit* MRS. BARFIELD. FRED PARSONS *enters a moment after.*]

FRED
How do you do, Esther ? [*Looking round the room, he sees pictures of race-horses, bridles, spurs, and whips.*] Why am I brought up here ?

ESTHER
Mrs. Barfield said it would be better to see you here,

on account of the other servants, and as we have things to talk about——

FRED
I've got the place for Jackie, and the wages are better than we expected ; he'll begin at ten shillings a week. Don't you think that's very good, Esther, for a boy of his age ?

ESTHER
Yes, Fred, it's very good.

FRED
I was thinking I might take him along with me by the afternoon train, and it can be all settled this evening.

ESTHER
I don't think I could get his clothes ready by then ; and he's wanted in the pantry.

FRED
Then you haven't told them ? . . . May I sit down, Esther ? I've walked rather fast from the station.

ESTHER
Yes, sit down.

FRED
And won't you ? But what is the matter, Esther ? No, I can't sit down. I must have it out with you, I can't wait.

ESTHER
I haven't spoken to Jackie about this plan of yours.

FRED
Why should you speak to him ? Doesn't his mother know what is best for him ?

ESTHER
But if he doesn't like it ?

FRED
He'll soon grow to like it. Or perhaps you have some other plan for him.

ESTHER
Mr. Barfield wants me to make a jockey out of him.

FRED
Esther ! You aren't going to begin that wickedness all over again ?

ESTHER
But don't you think, Fred, that Jackie should be given his choice ?

FRED
His choice of being a jockey ! Give a child his choice of going to the devil ?

ESTHER
But he is that taken up with the life here in the stables.

FRED
Then, Esther, you are going to allow your son to take up the same life of wickedness as his father. [*Enter* JACKIE.] How are you, Jackie ? I've got good news

for you. I've got an appointment for you as messenger boy in the dockyard ; ten shillings a week to begin upon, and afterwards if you give satisfaction there's plenty of opportunity for bettering yourself. Aren't you glad ? [JACKIE *hesitates.*]

ESTHER
Just say what you have in your mind, Jackie.

JACKIE
Why can't I stay here, mummie ?

FRED
If you come to Portsmouth, Jackie, you'll see great ships—you'll live among ships.

JACKIE
Are there any horses in Portsmouth ? [PARSONS *shakes his head.*] Then if I go to Portsmouth I'll never see a horse again ; and I shan't see mummie either.

ESTHER
I'll go to Portsmouth with you.
[JACKIE *looks from one to the other.*]

JACKIE
But, mummie, why can't you stay here and let me be a jockey ? Mr. Barfield says if I have any luck and win I may be drinking champagne with lords.

FRED
Like father like son.

JACKIE
Oh ! can't I stay here with you, mummie ?

ESTHER
Yes, dear. Run away now to the pantry.
[*Exit* JACKIE.]

FRED
Like father like son.

ESTHER
You mustn't speak ill of my boy to me ; any other boy would have chosen as he did.

FRED
I hope you won't regret your choice, Esther, that's all. I thought we would have watched the boy grow up together in the service of the Lord, but now you'll have to leave him here going down to the devil.

ESTHER
I must keep my boy.

FRED
Esther, I've waited all these years for you ; you surely will not refuse me now ?

ESTHER
I must stay with my boy.

FRED
Is that your last word, Esther ?

ESTHER
Yes, Fred.

FRED
And we say good-bye ?

ESTHER
You wouldn't like me afterwards if I was to leave my boy. I must stay with him. You know I am doing right, Fred, you that has worked for righteousness all your life.

[*He goes out. A moment after* JACKIE *enters and rushes into his mother's arms.*]

[*Curtain.*]

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